

FATHER MALACHY PEARSE CURRAN. S. D. B.

Dear Confreres,

Early on Saturday morning, November 18th, at Calvary Hospital as the Angelus was sounding in the nearby convent chapel, Fr. Malachy gave back his soul to God at the relatively early age of 50. If his passing seemed untimely, the manner of his death – surrounded as he was by his confreres and accompanied by the prayers of priests, nuns and boys – was an edification to all who witnessed it.

Father Curran was born in Belfast, N. Ireland on April 22nd 1917. When he was but two his father died, and soon after – when he was four – his mother also. God had marked him early as a man to bear crosses. As a Salesian aspirant he went to Shrigley Park, Cheshire England in September 1932 and made his novitiate at Cowley, Oxford from September 1935–6. He was overjoyed to be assigned to the Japanese missions and he served the Lord there from 1936–41. He taught Philosophy at Tokyo from 1939–41. At the outbreak of the war his superiors sent him to Australia, where he taught and studied theology until his ordination. He was ordained in Rupertswood chapel on December 1st 1944.

After ordination he remained at Rupertswood and in 1946 he became the headmaster there. After four years at Rupertswood he was asked to return to Japan in 1950, as missionaries who had worked in that country and understood the language and customs were then urgently needed. He returned to Australia in 1960 and laboured until 1966 in Port Pirie, South Australia, and in Rupertswood, Sunbury. The final year of his apostolate was spent at Savio College, Glenorchy, Tasmania.

Fr. Curran had not really enjoyed robust health from the earliest times of his work in Japan, as letters sent with him at the outbreak of war testify. His stomach ailments which began in those years were in later times aggravated by a liver complaint and finally by the rare blood condition which brought about his death. He entered Calvary Hospital, Hobart, in early September and he received the very best attention and treatment from the good sisters. After about six weeks he was discharged and came back to Savio College to convalesce. He was unable to regain his strength and after some three weeks or so he suffered a collapse of the liver and was immediately rushed to hospital. A week later he died.

On Monday, the 20th November, there was a Concelebrated Requiem Mass in the School Chapel. Among the ten concelebrating priests were representatives from all the religious orders in Hobart and from the Diocesan Clergy. In the absence of the Archbishop, the Episcopal Vicar presided. In the congregation were members of Religious Congregations, Sisters, Diocesan priests and many school children. The body was flown to Melbourne on the following day. On Wednesday the 22nd of November, twenty Salesian priests concelebrated the Requiem Mass of burial in the very chapel where 23 years before, Fr. Curran was ordained.

These are the chronological events and the record of the last days of Fr. Curran, but what of the man?, of the Salesian? Very many tributes have been paid to him from those who knew and worked with him in this country, in Japan, and from his own native land. Above all he was a man of Salesian kindliness. This, I feel was his distinguishing mark. Aware of his own failings, he was never heard to harshly judge another or to pass that word of criticism all too frequently heard. He had a charm of gentleness, manner, and consideration for others which was so markedly influential in bringing the young about him and in influencing others for good.

In his early years in Japan he was known for his spirit of sacrifice and strong-minded, patient, endurance of the hardships which were part and parcel of the daily work of those times. His health was poor but he did not spare himself. Fr. Curran was a Salesian devoted to his work of teaching. An able teacher and an attractive personality, he had the ability to draw the best out of his pupils and his record of success is an enviable one. The pupils remember him with gratitude and affection as the eloquent tributes at the time of his death testify.

Fr. Curran's, I suppose, was not a very spectacular life, in terms of fanfare and acclamation of the crowds, but it was one given to the Lord in sincerity and sacrifice. He was a modest and humble man. His last words were that he wished he had done better. But he had done so much to touch hearts and fill them with Christian faith and hope by showing them the living example of Christian charity. It is remarkable what an impact he made on people here in Tasmania when he had been here but a few months. This feeling of warmth towards him was experienced by so very many people. His friendship and concern were both genuine and deep.

The sufferings that Fr. Curran endured, the misunderstandings, and the sacrifices cheerfully undergone will bring for him the reward the Just Judge promises to those who are faithful. As you pray for the repose of his soul, I would be grateful for a remembrance for myself and the confreres of this house.

Yours sincerely in Don Bosco,

Kevin P. O'Leary. (Rector)

Necrology; Fr. Malachy Pearse Curran, born in Belfast, N. Ireland on April 22nd 1917. Died in Hobart, Tasmania on November 18th, 1967 at 50 years of age, 31 years of profession and 23 of priesthood.