

# fr. Thomas C. D'Amato



DIREZIONE GENERALE OPERE DON BOSCO	
arriv.	9 SET. 1974 C
concl.	

Born October 23, 1919

Professed Sept. 8, 1938

Ordained June 29, 1948

Died October 11, 1973

Saint Joseph Salesian Juniorate  
8301 Arroyo Drive  
Rosemead, California 91770

11. Thomas J. Adams

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Dear Confreres:

It is my sad duty to communicate to you the death of our beloved confrere, Fr. Tom D'Amato. On October 11, 1973, the Feast of the motherhood of Our Lady, he expired as the doctors tried frantically to save his life. He was assisted by the Very Rev. Thomas Prendiville, our Vice Provincial. A week earlier he had entered St. Vincent's Hospital in Los Angeles in order to correct a malfunction of the heart. Though the open-heart surgery (it was his second) seemed to have been successful, his diabetic condition rendered recovery extremely difficult. His enfeebled body and heart gave in under the strain. The cross which he bore for over twenty-five years had finally crushed him.

Our Province, Don Bosco Technical Institute, and especially this community, have now lost a loving friend, a conscientious teacher and a cheerful counsellor.

Father was a popular figure on the campus of Don Bosco Tech with his winning smile, his knack for remembering first names and his successful way of obtaining help for missionaries, with whom he kept frequent contact.

Father Tom was born in San Francisco on October 23, 1919. He frequented SS. Peter and Paul's Parochial School prior to his entering the Seminary in Richmond, California in 1933. He became a Salesian in Newton, New Jersey in 1938, where he also graduated from college four years later. His teaching practice followed during World War II at St. Francis School in Watsonville and in Richmond with the aspirants. He began his studies of theology in preparation for the priesthood in 1944 at Don Bosco College, Newton, New Jersey where he was ordained on June 29, 1948 at the hands of that great Salesian Missionary, Archbishop Louis Mathias of Madras, India.

His assignments after ordination were many and varied. Teacher and assistant at St. John Bosco in Bellflower; prefect at Salesian College in Aptos (1950-51); catechist in Richmond (1951-53) and in Bellflower (1953-56); teacher and assistant at Bosco Tech in Rosemead for the longest period of time in his short life (1956-71). Though not completely cut off from Bosco Tech, he lived the last two years in this Juniorate next to the Tech where he enjoyed the peace and quiet of its surroundings. He gladly and zealously helped the young men here with his smile, support and spiritual guidance in the confessional.



It is the consensus of so many of Fr. Tom's friends within and outside the Salesian Congregation that three characteristics were particularly outstanding in his life: His love of suffering, his love for the missions, and his priestly zeal.

### Love of Suffering:

The words of Holy Scripture aptly describe our beloved confrere in this regard: "We saw him as a man of suffering, accustomed to infirmity" (Is. 53:3); and "Did not the Messiah have to undergo all this so as to enter into his glory?" (Lk. 24:26). Fr. Tom had to bear a heavy cross. For over twenty-five years he carried about his diabetic handicap with great courage and resignation. He was patient with this condition, made no secret of it and followed cheerfully the direction of his doctor. In the last decade he suffered from a heart defect that rendered him weak and unable to accept the apostolate of the classroom, which he loved very much. He miraculously survived a first open heart surgery six years ago.

Through all this, he suffered with a smile that was contagious. He knew that his Divine Savior was giving him comfort and strength and an eternal reward. This cross of suffering gave meaning to his Priesthood and made him similar to the Divine High Priest by being a living victim himself. Gleaning through his copious spiritual notes I find the thought of cheerful suffering frequent. Let me quote but the following: "It is in dying that we are born to eternal life," (prayer of St. Francis) to me a very profound spiritual ascetical thought (truth). It is only by dying to self during our earthly life that we make certain our eternal life with God. Die to self means self denial. Mortification means mortem facere. "If any man will follow me, let him deny himself. Unless the grain of wheat die it alone remains. Die to the old man with all his concupiscences. Be born to the new man..."

Fr. Tom's patience and calm under the stress of suffering can be explained by the words found in a note of Fr. Provincial to him as he was about to undergo his last surgery. They are the words spoken by Our Lady of Guadalupe to Juan Diego: "Listen, my son, to what I tell you now: do not be troubled nor disturbed by anything. Do not fear illness nor any other distressing occurrence nor pain. Am I not your mother? Am I not life and health? Have I not



placed you on my lap and made you my responsibility? Do you need anything else?" A confrere who lived by his side for many years writes apropos of this: "His shining example of irrepressible cheerfulness and optimism amid the heavy crosses that God placed on his shoulders will always continue to inspire all of us in our daily round of activities."

A missionary from India wrote: "We lost a kind and generous friend in the person of Fr. Tom D'Amato. Through his sufferings for the past few years he has been preparing himself so nicely for the call of God and I am sure Our Lord must have given him a high place in Heaven."

### Love for the Missions:

Fr. Cesare Secchi, a Salesian Missionary in Japan, with whom Fr. Tom kept up correspondence, wrote to me upon hearing of his death: "If you knew how much good he has done to my mission in the last ten years! I shall forever keep a remembrance and gratitude."

Fr. D'Amato was ordained to the diaconate and priesthood by a great Salesian Missionary, Archbishop Mathias. Could we not say that some of the ardent zeal of this apostle of India and successor of St. Thomas the Apostle was passed on to Father Tom? At any rate, not being able to go to the mission fields, he faithfully urged his boys to contribute weekly to the missionary cause. He was in contact with a number of Salesian missionaries (Bishops Marengo, Carretto, Pintado; Fathers Lazar and Secchi, to mention only a few) and faithfully and carefully kept records of all contributions. The Office of the Propagation of the Faith for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles sent us a letter of commendation for his work in this regard. Because of the efforts of this dear confrere of ours in favor of the missions, Don Bosco Technical Institute in Rosemead was the highest contributor of all the Archdiocesan schools to the missionary appeals for a good many years.

But most of all, his contribution to the missionary activity of the Church is a spiritual one. The missions were constantly in his prayers and offered up his daily sufferings for his beloved missionaries. Bishop Carretto tells us that Fr. Thomas D'Amato "was extraordinary in the ordinary . . . I considered him as very near to me in missionary activities . . ."



## Priestly Zeal:

Fr. Tom D'Amato had just celebrated twenty five years of priesthood together with his ordination class in our beautiful church of SS. Peter and Paul in San Francisco. Somehow he felt that this would be the last anniversary; and he made it the climax of his priestly life. He was happy to celebrate it in the company of his aged and sickly mother. He was a happy priest; Christ was his model, the priest and the victim. "He was a true priest," Father Bernard Justen, a classmate of his, said in the eulogy; "he was a man of prayer who said Mass daily, readily administered the Sacraments, and gave spiritual guidance whenever requested. He was a true sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving." His recitation of the breviary and celebration of the Mass were exemplary. He truly "shared in the sacrifice, death and resurrection of Christ with the most total of self-giving." (Renewed Constitutions art. 122). "His cheerful disposition made his sufferings look easy," writes another confrere, "yet there were times when all that he could utter was some prayer."

The Pastor of St. Anthony's Church in San Gabriel, where Father D'Amato heard confessions every Saturday, says this of him: "He was a man who tempered asceticism and learning with common sense and prudence, thus accounting for his remarkably sound and practical judgment in his dealings with priests and lay people. As a priestly companion he excelled, and we at St. Anthony's had joyfully anticipated his company."

Here are other descriptions of Father Tom by a few of the many people that he came to know well: "He was notable for his readiness to listen and to uplift other people." "He had always a good word, or a smile for others." "It was his task to seek out people; he knew many people. He patiently listened to their problems and anxieties." "From the little we know of Father Tom, we know he was a holy priest as evidenced by the way he said Mass for us." "Among his confreres he always had a pleasant word or remark; he suffered to see how some of our confreres responded to the call of the world rather than the call to give themselves to the service of God."

His funeral was a tremendous manifestation of the esteem and affection in which he was held by the many friends that he made. As he laid in sweet repose in his priestly robes,

many that filed past his bier remarked that "he appeared joyous even in death." In order to permit as many as possible to attend this "farewell" it was arranged to hold two celebrations of the Liturgy of Christian Burial, one on Friday evening in place of the usual "Rosary" and the other on Saturday morning at 10:00 A.M. in the St. Joseph Memorial Chapel. His remains were then flown to San Francisco, his native city, for the final burial rites. The large Church of SS. Peter and Paul was filled to capacity by Salesians, Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and their pupils, relatives and friends of the D'Amato Family. It was particularly touching for the aged and infirm Mrs. Rose D'Amato, who only four months before was joyously celebrating her son's silver jubilee of ordination in the very same place. Fr. Provincial. Very Rev. Harry Rasmussen, led the celebrated Liturgy and Fr. Bernard Justen, former Provincial of the San Francisco Province and now Director of Don Bosco College, Newton, gave the eulogy. Father described Father Tom D'Amato as a "just man." He applied to him the words of the Book of Wisdom: "The just man shall be at rest. He who pleased God was loved. Having become perfect in a short while. he reached the fullness of a long career . . . his soul was pleasing to the Lord." (Wis. 4,7-14)

Father Tom D'Amato was laid at rest beside the tomb of his father in the mausoleum of Holy Cross Cemetery in Daly City, there to await the call of final resurrection.

May the life and example of this wonderful Salesian priest, inspire many young men to take up the cross and follow our Divine Lord in the Salesian Congregation.

Please pray for me and for this house of formation.

Sincerely yours in the Lord,

Rev. Mario Mich, S.D.B.  
Director



