



A photograph from his ordination year, 1975.

Fr John Doran, S.D.B., C.C.

Born: Graignamanagh, 9th August 1946

Baptised: Church of the Assumption, 11th August 1946

First Salesian Profession: Warrenstown, Co Meath, 15th August 1965

Final Profession: Daleside, South Africa, 4th April 1971

Priestly Ordination, Graignamanagh, 8th June 1975

Salesian College, Ballinakill: 1975 - 1981

Milford, Castletroy: 1981 - 1995

Called to eternal life: 21st March 1995

Go ndéana Dia trocaire ar a anam!

The sudden death of Fr John Doran, in the early hours of the morning of Tuesday 21st March 1995, came as a great shock to very many people: his family, the small Salesian community in Milford, the wider community of Salesians in Ireland, the people of Milford and neighbouring parishes, and his very many friends. It was hard to believe that Johnny, as we called him, was dead.

He had been in Milford almost fourteen years, as hostel-master and bursar in the Salesian community, as curate in the parish. He was extremely well known and loved by the people of this parish and locality. He had been here from the start, even before the parish started. He knew everybody. Everybody knew him and loved him. Johnny was a man whose whole life focussed on people: his family and friends, the people of this parish and neighbourhood, the students who stayed in the hostel, or passed the door, or came to the Church to pray. He had a word and a smile for everyone. He knew people by name, where they were from, who they were related to, their likes and dislikes, their problems and difficulties. There was nothing he liked better than to be able to do someone a good turn, whether it was a newcomer to the area looking for a house, or a student looking for accommodation, or a family with accommodation looking for a student. Perhaps it was driving someone to visit a friend in hospital, or driving someone to a hurling match, or just sitting in the pub, having an argument or a friendly chat. John was at his best and his happiest when he was with people, especially when he was able to help someone.

He loved sport and games of every kind. The GAA was a big part of his life, and he had a special love for hurling, particularly Kilkenny hurling, of which he was no mean exponent himself in his young days. He loved talking about sport, recalling past events or making confident predictions about upcoming games. Last year's prediction was that whoever beat Kilkenny would win the All-Ireland. He maintained that he still believed that five minutes from the end of the final when nobody else believed it, and of course he was proved right. He noticed on Monday, the day before he died, that Kilkenny were above Limerick in the National Football League, and that gave him great satisfaction - even though, as he admitted himself, they were above them because of alphabetical order rather than higher points. I remember him boasting a couple of years ago that at long last, Kilkenny had as many players as Cork on the All Stars football team - that was the year, of course, when Cork had none! This was typical Johnny, always having a go at someone, always enjoying the crack, and the fun and banter, but all the time relating to people, because the whole of his life was about relating to people.

He was a man of many talents, amongst them one in particular that was very significant for his priesthood. Johnny was a very impressive public speaker, with a fine strong clear voice and a great way with words. People loved his sermons, mainly because they were spontaneous and relevant. He spoke from the heart and he spoke straight to the hearts of his listeners. People liked Johnny's sermons because they touched their lives in the very ordinary things. There are few who appreciate the value of ordinary things as much as he did. His own lived gospel was of a very down-to-earth kind and his sermons always included practical examples, real practical ways of loving and helping one's neighbour. That was the gospel he believed in: that was the gospel he lived fully and generously and in every circumstance.

The measure of a man's greatness is the measure of his love. After all, love is what we're made for and love is the very essence of Christianity. And the measure of one's love is the love it evokes in return - because how else can you measure love? If you accept that measure, then Johnny was a mighty man indeed and a mighty priest. I don't think you'll find anywhere a priest, or indeed any man or woman, who was as well known and as well loved as Johnny was by the people of this parish and this locality. Men and women of all ages have shed tears in these last few days, and said how much they'll miss him. He really was loved by people of every age group, from the very young to the very old. He had a good deed, a kind and cheerful word, a helping hand for them all.

To say that everybody loved him, is not to say that he was always the easiest of people to get on with. John could be charming, but he could be gruff at times too. Yet people loved him nonetheless, perhaps because he was so genuine. Johnny had no time for sham - he was true to himself, all the time. People loved Johnny, not just in spite of his faults, but also because of them. Johnny's faults were part of his rich humanity, and that's what people loved. To say that Johnny was a man of the people is to fall into cliché, yet it's a phrase that, if it had not already existed, would surely have been invented to describe Fr Johnny Doran. It is as a man of the people that he will be remembered, and that is how he would wish to be remembered.

The Church here in Milford was thronged for Johnny's farewell Mass and very many of our parishioners and neighbours travelled to Graignamanagh for the Funeral Mass and burial. Johnny had often said that he wanted to be laid to rest in his beloved Graignamanagh, and so it was. In his inspiring homily at the Funeral Mass, Fr Martin Loftus summed up the thoughts of many of us, in words adapted from Patrick Kavanagh:

"I do not think of you, lying in the wet clay of a Kilkenny graveyard.
I see you walking down the stairs, among the students,
on your way to your office.
Or happily saying second Mass on a summer Sunday,
your words breaking out in compassion.
You meet me and you say: "There's a mug of tea in the kitchen."
Among your earthiest words, the angels stray.

And I think of you, Johnny, pacing the edge of the hurling field,
shouting, your passionate eyes filled with fire, for black and amber,
you stand strong, blunt and real.

And I recall us meeting at Monaleen's edge,
on a winter's night by accident.
We drink a pint, a greeting on your lips for all.
Relaxed in God's bliss, free, you sit,
lost in the humorous streets of banter.

Oh, you are not lying in the wet clay, for it is spring morning now,
with the hostel full, children soon for First Communion,
with Easter flowers opening.
And you smile at us eternally."

No doubt Johnny is smiling on us, but he will be greatly missed, for he was greatly loved. He will be missed most of all by his mother and brothers and sisters to whom we offer our deepest sympathy, and also by the Salesians in Ireland and the people of Milford and neighbouring parishes. We offer him back to God with sadness in our hearts, but with gratitude too. We pray that God will look kindly on Johnny and receive him into His Kingdom. We pray too that He will comfort those who mourn his loss and fill the emptiness in their hearts with His love.

Please pray for this small community in Milford, and pray that God may call others into the Salesian family, to be signs and bearers of God's love to the young.

Fr Michael Smyth, SDB
Rector
Salesian House, Milford, Castletroy, Limerick