

During the summer we were all saddened by the death of dear Fr. Doyle, who worked for most of his Salesian life in South Africa. He was a jovial and gentle man, a man of great goodness and charm. As many of our readers will not have known this great priest, who spent 48 years working in Africa, we asked Fr. Ainsworth, his colleague and friend for the past seventeen years or so, to give us this pen-picture of him. What follows is his account.

For nearly half of a century Father Doyle has been part of the Catholic landscape in Cape Town. It started with his being Brother James, back in 1927, and some still remember him as tall and thin. For two generations he has been there and everybody knew him; every priest that ever came to South Africa in the old days used to come through Cape Town and most of them spent a day or two staying with the Salesians at the Institute. Taxi drivers used to bring them up and in minutes they were laughing with Fr. Doyle, immense and affable, concerned to make them welcome.

Even when he was over at Lansdowne, six miles away, he was still very much part of the city life. At Lansdowne now there is the great church - Fr. Barraghray's dream child. But old men and women, coloured folk as well as white, will tell you how Fr. Doyle married them in the large class-room that was the chapel forty years ago; grandfathers and grandmothers they are now, but he baptised their children, and their children's children, and their children again. Sick calls drew him into the poorest and richest quarters; converts he made, men and women, simple and erudite; he was everyone's priest and loved everyone. Surely, of all God's priests in that teeming city, of all races and colours and creeds, no one was more greatly loved.

Just after the war he went to Palestine to try to cope with a difficult situation. But soon he was back again, and almost at once was sent up to the Transvaal, a thousand miles north-east, to make the first real break-through for the Salesians in more than half a century. The then bishop of the diocese loved to recount how, a couple of days after the arrival of the community with Fr. Doyle in charge, he visited them, to find them at lunch with one table and

one chair. The chair was offered to His Lordship while the rest of the community sat on the packing cases they had brought from the Cape. They joked about it, remarking that at least Fr. Doyle couldn't break those sturdy chairs, but the bishop never forgot the poverty and simplicity of it all.

Fr. Doyle laid good foundations for the now flourishing work at Daleside. But the highveld was too much for his now vast frame and gratefully he returned to the Cape. Five times he was Rector and was wise and acceptable in his governing.

He was, of course, a Liverpool man, born in Bootle in 1907, going to Battersea as a boy but doing his final studies in South Africa where he was ordained by an old missionary bishop, Mgr. O'Leary OMI in 1932 (all the others were in Dublin for the Eucharistic Congress). He loved going back to his home town, sometimes at long intervals but a little more frequently in latter days. He would go happily across to Ireland and once looked up his distant family roots. It was just typical of him to be delighted to find that a roistering great-grandfather had been fined two pounds for being drunk and disorderly. "That's all I could find about the great man!" he used to say.

At the end of June this year he came over by air for the very first time. Had he come by ship he might not have reached his home. He said his Mass in the school chapel at Bootle, and after his thanksgiving, he was saying his rosary as he had done for years, quite alone with the busy school life all around him, when he fell in front of the Blessed Sacrament, his beads still in his fingers, on July 9th, 1975.

From that Salesian school chapel he was buried. The Concelebrated Mass was presided over by a life-long family friend, Fr. Patrick Erskine SDB. Fr. Egan who was still Provincial at the time, concelebrated with him. So too did Fr. Higgins, the English Provincial, and many other priests. In Cape Town the Cardinal, whose confessor he was for many years, presided over the Requiem Mass in the Salesian Institute (Somerset Road), and all the city mourned the loss of their great father. May he rest in Peace.