



FR. JOHN DROZDA, SDB

BORN: March 3, 1918

PROFESSED: September 8, 1943

ORDAINED: June 29, 1953

DIED: November 10, 1987

Dear Confreres,

With this letter I wish to recall the memory of our confrere, Father John Drozda, S.D.B. who peacefully rested in the Lord on November 10, 1987.

Shortly before his death, after a bout with cancer for several long months, he was again visited by the Very Reverend Richard McCormick who found him in greater discomfort than usual. Father realized that it was time to gently prepare our confrere for a death that was very imminent. So he reminded Father Drozda of the consoling words of Don Bosco who, on his deathbed, sent a message: "Tell my boys that I will be waiting for them in paradise." He told Father Drozda that Don Bosco meant these words for him, too. In his usual spirit of prayer and surrender, Father Drozda reacted with the warmth of his strong faith. After receiving the blessing of Mary Help of Christians, Father Drozda gave his own priestly blessing to all those gathered in the room. Not long after Father Provincial's visit, Father Drozda breathed his last.

Father Drozda leaves us a legacy of devoted pastoral ministry, generous love for the missions, remarkable fidelity to religious life, and a marvelous simplicity of faith. He was obedient to the end, accepting the suggestion of Father Provincial to rejoice, despite his pain, over the consoling words of Don Bosco as if directed to himself.

Until the very end John also preserved his sense of humor. He was noted for his dry wit. His sister recalls one of the many quips he used--to people who complained about the weather he would say, "If it doesn't rain, how are you to find out if your roof leaks?"

John was born March 3, 1918 in Minneapolis, Minnesota as son of the late Nicholas and Pauline Hussar Drozda. On March 10, he was baptized in St. John's Byzantine Catholic Church. The family moved to Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, where he received his primary education. At the age of 20 John entered Don Bosco Seminary High School in Newton, New Jersey and pursued a four-year curriculum in remote preparation for the priesthood. During these years, he was exemplary in conduct, merited high esteem from his superiors, and enjoyed an easy ascendancy over his fellow students who often depended on him for help in various ways. He was always willing to lend a helping hand in every project. In those years, as well as later, in the words of one of our confreres, "He was not one for much noise and fanfare, but he was a believer and had no fear of speaking out." Another confrere, recalling early memories, writes: "John was a man of humility, a quality that he cultivated from his youth. When he came to Newton, he was the oldest aspirant, yet he was not embarrassed to start his high school courses as a freshman. He cultivated this virtue throughout his life--always attending to his duties in simplicity and calm. Later, when he became a student of theology in Turin he mingled easily with the international group--there were 27 nations represented. His quiet ways and unassuming nature made him very acceptable. He was deeply appreciative to have been sent to Turin where he became enthused with all things Salesian. Then, as always afterwards, his prayer life was simple, quiet, without any exterior show. His interior life was the basis of his gentle and kind ways which became the effective instruments in his later apostolate.

John completed his novitiate at Newton on September 8, 1943 and made his first profession at that time. He renewed his profession at Newton after having completed his college studies in 1946. For three years he was assigned as teacher and



assistant to the Salesian School in Goshen, New York. He took perpetual vows on September 8, 1949. He then did his theological studies at the Salesian Pontifical Atheneum, Turin, Italy. After studying theology in Turin, he was ordained to the priesthood in the Russian College in Rome by Archbishop Alexander Evreinoff on June 29, 1953. He celebrated his first mass in St. Peter's in Rome and his first solemn high mass in St. Mary's Byzantine Rite Catholic Church, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania.

Always obedient, Father Drozda served in many capacities in several of our Salesian communities of the Eastern Province. He was Prefect of Studies in Mary Help of Christians School, Tampa, Florida (1953-54). First as Prefect of Studies and later as Catechist, he worked at Don Bosco, West Haverstraw, New York (1954-58; 1963-65). We find him as financial administrator at Don Bosco College (1958-59) and later at Sacred Heart Juniorate, Ipswich, Massachusetts (1962-63). He became director at Don Bosco, Huttonsville, West Virginia and also lent his services to parishes both of the Roman and Byzantine rites (1959-62). From 1965 to 1970 he became Pastor of the Byzantine Church of the Holy Spirit in Mahwah, New Jersey.

Father Drozda was a quiet scholar and never lost interest in learning, putting it to effective use. He was fluent in Ruthenian, in Ukrainian, in Italian, and in Spanish. He taught Latin, and this knowledge enabled him to be helpful in the Byzantine Rite in making official translations from Roman documents. He also served as Judge on the Matrimonial Tribunal in the Byzantine Diocese of Passaic. In 1965 he received the degree of Master of Arts in Education from Duquesne University. During this time he taught Byzantine Liturgy to Latin Rite priests. In 1972 he was appointed superintendent of schools in the Pennsylvania vicariate of the Byzantine Catholic Diocese of Passaic. His interest in education was not merely on the abstract level, but very personal. His parishioners recall how the school children would knock on his door for help in their homework. He always obliged, with the result that sometimes lots of children could be seen surrounding the table that served as his work desk.

Father Drozda's many pastoral activities were always carried out in this personal way from 1970 until shortly before his death while he served as zealous pastor of SS. Peter and Paul Byzantine Catholic Church in Minersville, Pennsylvania and Holy Spirit Church in Williamstown. There he will be sorely missed. People will remember the simplicity of Father Drozda, typified by the old car he kept for himself, while buying new things for his associate and for the church. The principal of SS. Peter and Paul School has written the following testimony about Father John:

"Every day he took time out from his busy schedule as pastor to chat and tell stories to the children on the playground. He taught Religion Class once a week in grades 7 and 8 plus he took the better students in my class twice a week and taught them Latin and Spanish to prepare them for high school.

"At the end of a school day, he came over and chatted with the children as they departed on their school buses - a real Father in every sense of the word.

"He was very proud of this school! He brought anyone who came to see him over to visit with the school children.

"The children, faculty and parents truly loved him. He is still missed today. The children still talk about his humor, and how he always had time for them. He was truly a people person.

"As I wrote this letter I cried. We do miss him, he was really a saintly person. He often told the children that he

would always be grateful to the Salesian Community which helped him achieve his goal in life - to be a servant of the Lord."

Father Drozda remained as Pastor until July 1987 when he was admitted to the Little Flower Nursing Home in Wilkes-Barre. It was there that he died in November. His funeral, held in Minersville, bore witness to the great affection and esteem in which he was held. The office of Christian burial with Pontifical Divine Liturgy was celebrated in Minersville by the Most Reverend Michael J. Dudick, D.D., Bishop of Passaic, assisted and attended by many people and Salesian confreres.

At the end of life, Father Drozda reaped the fruit of his many labors. He invites us by his example to a fervent life in the Salesian Society, at the service of God's people according to the call of obedience. He asks for the charity of our prayers.

In his funeral eulogy, Father Frank Twardzik looked beyond the many places Father John worked and the material accomplishments he completed. "Father John was always the priest, an ambassador of Christ...He was everywhere a priest...His conduct and vocabulary were always that of a priest of Jesus Christ."

Sincerely yours in Christ,

*Vincent Zaniewski*

Rev. Vincent Zaniewski, SDB  
Director