

My Dear Confreres,

On 4th November last, one of the confreres of this house:

## FR. WILLIAM FAHEY

was called to his eternal reward. We had been warned continually by the doctors that his health was very poor, and that we must not be surprised if he had a sudden collapse. Nevertheless when their worst fears materialised, each of us felt a deep sense of loss.

William Fahey was born at Modeligo, Co. Waterford, on 14th June, 1885. He received his early education from the Irish Christian Brothers, and he had an abiding admiration for the self-sacrifice of these splendid educators, who have done so very much for the Faith and the Homeland. From the school of the Christian Brothers, William Fahey went to the college conducted by the Cistercian monks at Mount Mellary. Throughout his life it was easy to discern the good effects of this early contact with the men of God. Surely it was here that he was first inspired with a love for a life "hidden with Christ in God," a life of manual work sanctified by the strong traditional Faith of his race.

It was in the shadow of this hallowed place, Mt. Mellary, that he passed from a carefree youth to the thoughtful sobriety of a young Catholic tradesman. For after leaving school, he joined his father and brothers in the building trade. Like so many young Irishmen, perforce he had to leave the quiet of his native Co. Waterford to seek opportunity for that prosperity which is the reward of skill and sustained honest endeavour. His occupation—he was a joiner—took him to Dublin, and afterwards to the extensive building schemes in various parts of the British Isles during the disastrous 1914-1918 conflict. These were hard years, as he used to admit himself. But the experience culled from this period of his life was invaluable later on when he was a Confessor. In after-years as a priest, he would at times come across some of his fellow-tradesmen who had worked with him, and he was always pleased to meet them, and to help them in every possible way. He was a conscientious worker who was respected by his fellows not only as a craftsman, but especially as a splendid Catholic. The strength of his faith was tested, sustained, and deepened in the difficult environment of a war-torn country.

But amid the hectic bustle of his activities, in the quiet of his mind there endured the insistent truth of life's real purpose. He felt called to a higher life: but was it mere sentiment, or was it a true vocation? Slowly the notion of becoming a priest crystallised into conviction. He would have to resume his studies—surely a courageous decision for a man in his thirties. With a view to this, and also to have an opportunity to decide where his true vocation lay, he returned to Ireland and began his study at Mount St. Benedict, Co. Wexford, under the late Don Sweetman O.S.B. Fr. Fahey had a genuine affection for this good Benedictine priest who helped him through his first difficult days of discouragement and indecision. Eventually he decided to try his vocation in the Salesian Congregation.

In 1919 he entered the Salesian House of Studies at Oxford as an aspirant; and in 1922 he began his Novitiate. What it must have cost this young man to accommodate himself to school-life and to the minutiae of Novitiate observance, after the independence of his early manhood, needs no stressing. Nevertheless, as a Novice William Fahey was not only an example to all, but was a source of encouragement to many who admired his quiet persevering spirit. By nature he was rather shy, but this shyness was patiently remoulded into appropriate religious retirement and recollection. At the end of his Novitiate in 1923 he made his Religious Profession, and he began his philosophical and theological studies. Seven years later, on 15th August, 1930, he was ordained priest in London by the late Archbishop Amigo of Southwark.

It was now that Fr. Fahey's true worth was seen. Released from the stress and strain of his studies, his activities became eminently practical in every sense. His experience in the building trade proved invaluable in the houses where he worked. At Warrenstown, even before his ordination, he initiated many an awkward beginner into the mysteries of chisel, hammer and saw. As a priest, besides discharging the offices of Prefect, Catechist, and Spiritual Director, he successfully directed operations in several building projects. Thus it was that Fr. Fahey was among those Salesians who did trojan work in the first years of the houses at Shrigley Park, Cheshire; Blaisdon Hall, Gloucestershire; and at Ballinakill, Co. Laois, where the concert-hall is a typical example of his work. He was an ideal companion in such a task. His technical knowledge enabled him to obviate difficulties which would have retarded the development of the work on the buildings: but more important still, he was a most observant and self-sacrificing religious who shouldered many burdens in his own inimitable way. He was a patient craftsman who would countenance neither slipshod methods nor slovenly work.

But it is as a truly saintly priest, and especially as an understanding confessor, that Fr. Fahey will be long remembered. His faith, like Don Bosco's was simple and strong, but it was its depth that impressed. Here, truly, was the just man who lived by faith: in fact one was inclined to forget that this inner life had been carefully cultivated: he seemed one of those whose nature it was to be good effortlessly. This was not the case, for he was quick-tempered, but long self-discipline and his kind heart prompted him to see the good in everyone. He forgave most readily.

Of his spirit of piety there was ample evidence. His love for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament shone through his exhortations and words of advice, especially in the Confessional, while he often boasted—justifiably surely—that from his earliest years, even as a young tradesman in unsympathetic surroundings, he never failed to say the fifteen decades of the Rosary every day. As was but natural he had a wonderful devotion to St. Joseph; while he often recalled how Don Bosco's early struggles to reach the priesthood encouraged him when difficulties in the Novitiate and early religious life beset him on every side. It would be difficult to deal adequately with Fr. Fahey's inner life. It is like trying to paint a man's soul. Let us regard his devotions this way. The last phase of life was like the final movement of a glorious symphony. The fundamental themes that ran through his life commingled in a harmonious finale, giving challenge to death's sombre mystery. He died on a Wednesday, the day of devotion to his beloved St. Joseph, himself a craftsman who fashioned carefully with wood. It is significant that he died while the boys were singing the Tantum Ergo at Benediction: that he lay in the chapel while the boys' confessions for the Happy Death were in progress—how often he had been the confessor—that he was buried on the First Friday of the month: that the following day was one of special devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Such a death-pattern was no mere coincidence.

His health gave concern for a number of years, especially since the calamitous loss by fire of the house at Ballinakill in 1950 while he was stationed there. Shortly after this, he came to Pallaskenry, and though he did have some periods of improvement, his health gradually deteriorated. For some time before his death he was wholly incapacitated. His enforced confinement to bed was a constant penance for one who had been so active: but he bore his cross with quiet strength. Nevertheless, his prayer must often have been akin to that of Card. Newman's "Gerontius":

*"Take me away,  
That sooner I may rise and go above,  
And see Him in the truth of everlasting Day".*

God called him to Himself at 8 p.m. on 4th November 1953, and now he lies in the college cemetery with the mortal remains of the late Fr. Michael MacGinty who was his pupil in Warrenstown. May they rest in peace.

We earnestly recommend the soul of Fr. Fahey to the charity of your prayers, begging also a remembrance in your prayers for the needs of this house which Fr. Fahey loved so well.

*I am,*

*Yours very devotedly in Don Bosco.*

P. BREEN, S.D.B.

*Rector.*

*Data for Necrology: 4th November.*

Father William Fahey, born Modeligo, Co. Waterford, died at Pallaskenry, Limerick, in the 67th year of his age, 30th of his Religious Profession, and the 23rd of his Priesthood.