

Fr. Patrick Foley, R.I.P.



Salesian College,
Ballinakill,
Portlaoise,
August 1981

Dear Confreres,

It is with deep regret that I inform you of the death of our dearly loved confrere

FR. PATRICK FOLEY

who died in the County Hospital Portlaoise, on 8th March, 1981.

Patrick Foley was born in Tralee, Co. Kerry on 15th March, 1920. He entered Salesian College, Pallaskenry in 1938 with one thing in mind, and one thing only - to give his life to God as a Salesian. He was a good student, a good musician, a fine footballer and an upright and honest character. These qualities, added to his pleasant personality, made him a popular and highly respected leader among his companions.

When the first Irish Salesian Novitiate opened here in Ballinakill in 1941, Patrick Foley was among the Novices. He made his first Profession here in Ballinakill on 25th March, 1942. Bro. Patrick Foley was now a Salesian, ready to go wherever the Lord called him to bring the good news of Christ to the young.

The newly professed Bro. Patrick went to Shrigley in England to begin his ecclesiastical studies. He brought with him his customary joy and zest for life, qualities so dear to the heart of St. John Bosco. It was here in 1944 that the shadow of a big cross fell suddenly across this young man's life. Bro. Patrick fell seriously ill. There was little hope of recovery and very little prospect of his ever reaching ordination. Sickness brought out the real strength of the man, his deep faith and tremendous appreciation of God's will.

He returned to Ireland in 1945 and on January 10th, 1949 made his final vows from his hospital bed in Dublin - a bed that everyone thought was to be his deathbed. Faced with a serious operation which offered only a slim chance of success, he remarked: "I am in God's hands. He knows best. Whether He wants to take me now or later, I welcome His will." Bro. Patrick

did survive the operation and break-through in medical science at the time helped to put him on his feet again. From that day to the day he died, Pat was an apostle among us all, a model of patience, kindness and love of God.

A lesser man would have been content to take things easy at this stage, but not Pat. With fantastic courage he took up his studies for the priesthood, in spite of his poor health and weakened constitution. Here it is appropriate to pay tribute to two priests who were of immense help to him - Fr. James Kinsley and the late Fr. Willie Drohan. Without their private tuition and their encouragement, it is doubtful if he could have attained the goal of the priesthood.

Fr. Pat was ordained priest in Melchet Court, England on 17th June, 1955. Many had feared that he would never reach this goal - little did they think that he would live to celebrate

his Silver Jubilee, as he did last year.

After ordination the greater part of his priestly life was spent in Pallaskenry, in the Missions Office, and looking after the spiritual needs of the domestic staff. Fr Foley came to Ballinakill in 1977 and gave of his best as assistant to the Bursar. His efficiency and quiet systematic approach contributed greatly to the smooth running of the office and his help will be sorely missed.

Though his work was with books and figures, his real concern was for people. "It's not figures or schemes that matter most," he said shortly before his death, "it's people." Fr Pat always had time for people. He took a keen interest in all his confreres and their work. He had a word of praise and encouragement for everyone. He knew most of the boys in the school, even though his health prevented him from meeting them. For himself he made very few demands. His philosophy was "the more we get, the more we want."

Fr. Pat will be remembered for his great kindness even more than for his patient suffering. He enjoyed community life and laughed at the foibles of his confreres, but always in the kindest possible way. I don't think anyone can recall Fr. Pat saying a harsh or unkind word - an enviable record for any priest. He was indeed "a man incapable of malicious thought, word or deed; one adorned with a heart of gold." Pat had a great love for music, for nature, for all that is beautiful in God's world.

His apostolate was to suffer quietly and to inspire those around him. God sends such people among us to help lift up those of us who are weaker. His passing now leaves us all poorer, but we have gained a friend in heaven.

His final period of hospitalisation was brief. On Thursday, 5th March, Fr. Foley went to the County Hospital, Portlaoise, hoping that a short stay there would build him up sufficiently to enable him to return to Ballinakill. Alas, it was not to be. His condition deteriorated rapidly. In the early hours of the morning of Sunday, 8th March, word came from the hospital that the end was near. He passed away peacefully in the early afternoon. At his bedside were two of his confreres, his sisters whom he loved so dearly and whose visits meant so much to him in his latter years, his relatives and some of the hospital staff who had been so good to him.

After concelebrated Requiem Mass on Tuesday, 10th March Fr. Patrick was laid to rest in the small community cemetery here in Ballinakill. May the memory of his cheerful friendly ways be an inspiration to all of us.

Please pray for the happy repose of his soul, and for the confreres of this house and their work.

Yours sincerely in Don Bosco,

Michael Smyth, SDB
Rector.

