

May 1984

Dear Confrères,

As Friday, April 6th, dawned, the soul of our dear

BROTHER THOMAS GALLACHER

went to God to receive the great reward that must surely be his after a lifetime of unceasing work in the Salesian vineyard.

Since Christmas his health, due to a heart condition, had been slowly deteriorating. Up to the day before his death, the medical opinion had been consistently optimistic, declaring the result of the latest cardiograph as reassuring, there being no need for hospitalisation but simply for rest. But God has His own ways and Brother Thomas was well prepared for any call that might come. In a community service shortly before the end, he received the Anointing of the Sick and never once missed his daily Mass and Holy Communion throughout his illness.

He came to the Salesians in 1935, recommended by that great friend of Don Bosco, Father Frigerio of the parish of St. Aloysius in Glasgow. The good priest wrote of him; 'He is 25, in excellent health, of exemplary character. He has a great love for boys and a great gift in looking after them. Indeed just now, he is an excellent scoutmaster in an adjoining parish.' Perhaps there was inspiration in the fact that, during his two years, from 1935, as an aspirant at Blaisdon Hall, Gloucestershire, he was under the guidance of that superb Salesian Father Angelo Franco, one of whose dearest aims in life was the enrolment of good Salesian Brothers. This included the education of the Catholic public, and particularly of men of mature years, in the ethos of the Salesian Brother and of the opportunities that God was offering such prospective apostles who, as complete and worthy religious and craftsmen, could put their hands in the Hands of God and render to young souls a service which the Church and the world need just as keenly today.

On September 1st, 1937, Brother Thomas entered the Novitiate at Beckford and was professed on August 31st, 1938, making his perpetual profession at Blaisdon on July 15th 1944.

By profession, Brother Thomas was a builder and there cannot be a single House or school in the Province which does not bear the mark of his labours. He was a prodigious worker and never happy unless he were working. Someone once remarked, 'If Rome was not built in a day, it was because Brother Thomas was not on the job!' Our Salesian Sisters, too, count him amongst their dearest benefactors for they never appealed to his help in vain; he was never happier than when he was able to come to their rescue in some crisis of repair or restoration.

But there was always that other building, the building that, as St. Paul reminds us, has Jesus Christ for its foundation and the Holy Spirit for its architect; that, too, was accomplished in truly Salesian fashion, inseparably linked with the material building. 'Work is prayer', Don Bosco preached, and our Brother Thomas practised. There was also the invisible building of friendships which, like his buildings in bricks and mortar, have stood the test of time. Letters that have come to the Rector of the House since his death speak of the effect he had, especially on the younger Salesians. A cleric writes that 'Brother Thomas was always an inspiration, in prayer, in work, in community, always joyful and optimistic, always youthful; in all these qualities, I have tried to imitate him'. Others repeat this encomium.

Brother Thomas carried his gift of friendship to South Africa where he worked without stint for thirteen years; he has left a splendid legacy of building, with chapels and schools in South Africa and Swaziland, with houses for the African workers with whom he from the first established the happiest of relations. Stories of him abound – he dearly loved a good story! – and his memory will be revered for many a year.

He returned to Europe in 1970, spending two years in Ireland at the well-known Salesian Agricultural school at Warrenstown; but again there, too, was always ready to help out in any project in any Salesian House.

After a couple of years in Glasgow, he came to this House of Thornleigh, Bolton, in 1974, and for ten years has been a well loved member of the Community, while at the same time, utilising his skills for the benefit of many other Houses in the Province as needs arose. He was always a most welcome visitor in any House, or convent, and rarely travelled anywhere without the tools of his trade.

Death may have come somewhat as a surprise; but it was also a prize, for Brother Thomas could not have faced a slow death as an invalid. Death, we know, is not the end of the journey back to God, it is merely the beginning of the last stage of our life's journey.

At the two Solemn Requiem Masses in the School Chapel, besides the large numbers of Salesians, diocesan priests, Sisters and Brothers, and the School Sixth Form, who lined the path in his honour as the cortege left the grounds, there were many other friends, who were not Catholics but who greatly respected, indeed revered him. Our deepest sympathy goes out to his family and especially to his dear sister Betty, to whom he was very close; many friends came down from Scotland to share both her grief and her pride in her brother, this splendid son of Saint John Bosco who will be one more of our intercessors in Heaven. But while we rightly honour his memory, let us not forget him in our Holy Masses and in our prayers. He was always the first to pray for the dead and in this too we must follow him in our true brotherly affection, that he may soon enter the place God has prepared for one of His most faithful servants.

May I ask you, too, to remember in your prayers the needs of this House and of our community, from whom the hand of death has taken so many in recent years.

Yours always in St. John Bosco

JAMES CONWAY, SDB

Rector.

DATA for the NECROLOGY:

BROTHER THOMAS GALLACHER, born Glasgow, Scotland, June 17th, 1910, professed Beckford August 31st, 1938, died Bolton, April 6th, 1984, aged 73.