



Salesians of St. John Bosco



Salesian House,
Highfield Road,
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28th May, 1987

FATHER THOMAS HALL, S.D.B.

In the early hours of Wednesday, 8th April, 1987, Father Thomas William Hall died in his sleep, at the age of 85, in Chertsey.

He was a man blessed with good health, for most of his life, and full of energy. But dynamoes do run down; and signs were showing in the past few years—more especially in the past few months—and like Don Bosco he died, just worn out.

A man of many talents, he had a wonderful touch with water colours and a sketch pad; a gifted speaker, he had a real presence; a leader, he exuded confidence; a preacher with a depth of material; based on reading and prayer. He was in demand as a retreat preacher, even in his years of greatest responsibility; as a spiritual guide, he had a wide clientele, to whom he gave a sense of great security. His generous nature, and pleasant manner, made him so approachable. His interests were manifold; his prudence, a thing to be admired; his vision, wide. He was blessed with a constitution to tackle a host of problems, from decision making, to holding his own on the sportsfield.

Fr. Hall was born in London on 9th March, 1902, the son of William and Edith (nee Page) Hall. His sister Marjorie, lives in the Bognor Regis area, and was present with her daughter and family at the funeral on Tuesday, 14th April, 1987.

Educated in private schools, he turned his attention, at the age of 20, to teaching—in the Senior Mixed School, Hanwell, Middlesex—with the highest recommendation from the headmaster.

Not a cradle Catholic, his enquiring mind led him to St. Benedict's Priory, Ealing, where he was instructed and received into the Catholic Church by Fr. (later Bishop) Pearson O.S.B., on Good Friday 1923; and confirmed on Pentecost Sunday of the same year, in Westminster Cathedral.

He entered Osterley College, Middlesex, to study for the Priesthood. He had looked hard at teaching, then turned his mechanical bent to engineering, so that the "trainee engineer" was now working his way through Latin and Greek. This man of many parts, having looked at various options, joined students with new openings, for the secular clergy, for the Jesuits, Benedictines, Franciscans etc. Don Bosco's appeal came his way, and he applied to become a Salesian.

It was Fr. Pearson's hope that he would join the Benedictines, but instead Thomas Hall became a novice at the Salesian Novitiate in Oxford at the age of 23. He spent four years in Cowley, studying philosophy, and teaching the younger confreres. Then—on to Turin where he was ordained in 1934. Both in Oxford and Turin, he combined his studies with that of Editor of "The Help of Christians" magazine—his literary style making him well equipped for the task.

Returning to England after ordination, he was back in his beloved Oxford, where he directed the scholastic studies of the students and the aspirants for two years. He was, in fact, the first Salesian to promote University courses for the young Salesians, as a "sine qua non", in the running of our schools.

At the age of 34 he took on a series of responsibilities which lasted till 1972. He was Rector for 21 years (Shrigley, Blaisdon, Beckford, Battersea, Cowley, Battersea), Vice-Provincial for three years, Provincial for twelve years, and on the Provincial Council for most of his time.

When Fr. Hall became Provincial in 1952 he brought to that onerous task, energy and enthusiasm fired by a genuinely Salesian vision and prudent foresight. Few people realise, for example, the the finances of the Province had to be established on firm foundations before new developments could become possible. The Anglo-Irish Province as it then was, experienced a growth in numbers, to over five hundred confreres. Almost all the schools acquired new school buildings; and new works were founded in England, Ireland and South Africa. It was during that period that Provincial Delegates were first appointed in Ireland, Malta and South Africa.

While so much was happening on a grand scale, Fr. Hall never overlooked the individual; in particular any sick confrere. He took pains to make them feel valued, and still needed in the wider Salesian work of the Province. It was Fr. Hall who sowed the seed for the idea of the Council of Major Religious Superiors in England and Wales. He was its President for six years.

At 70 years of age, he found a new apostolate—confessor to the Salesian School, community and Convent in Chertsey. He seemed to be almost as energetic at 84 as he was at 70 in spite of a double hip operation. He was the anchor man for the Think-Days, Retreat Days, Bona Mors—Days of Recollection, in Chertsey. He moved with the times, and related to the problems which came his way. For many, he was their Cure d'Ars. His charisma we miss, his cheerfulness we remember, nor can we forget his sense of community—he led by example.

He had many highlights in his life—perhaps the most gratifying, when his parents later followed him into the Catholic Church. He could look back on a life of great satisfaction. Up to about two months before his death, he was always at meditation and spiritual reading. His preparation for daily Mass was exemplary, and in his last critical weeks he only missed Mass a few times, always enquiring "what time are we celebrating Mass today Father?" He wanted to dwell on the Mass. He knew his passport was stamped, when he requested the whole community to be present on the occasion of receiving the Sacrament of Healing at the end of Fr. Provincial's visitation, with the laying on of hands.

His remains lay in the community chapel for four days, and were then received into St. Anne's for the last night. Fr. Provincial was flanked by Fr. Higgins and Fr. Kennedy, as nearly fifty confreres concelebrated the final Requiem Mass. The presence of so many Sisters, Co-operators, parishioners and friends, with his own kith and kin, at the Mass and at the nearby Chertsey cemetery, testify to the memory of a truly great Salesian.

May he rest in peace.

FOR THE NECROLOGY

FR. THOMAS WILLIAM HALL—born in London, 9th March 1902, died in Chertsey 8th April 1987 at 85 years of age, in the 61st year of his profession and 53rd of priesthood. He was for 3 years Vice-Provincial, for 12 Provincial and for 21 years Rector.