

Dear confreres,

*The Salesian Community at Brooklyn Park,
grateful for you condolences and prayers for
the soul of our deceased confrere, FATHER
JOHN LIVESEY, wishes to share with you
some of the memories and qualities of his
priestly and religious life.*

John Livesey was born on 8 February 1914 in Great Harwood in the country of Lancashire, England, the eldest son of James and Mary Livesey. He was baptised in the parish church of Saint Wulfstan. His early schooling was cut short owing to financial difficulties in the family, and John worked for four years as a corn merchant's labourer. He attributed his back troubles in later years to his having to lift heavy sacks of corn.

John heard the invitation of the Lord to work in his vineyard, and he applied to enter the Salesian Society. Being of a somewhat advanced age for the aspirantate at Shrigley, Cheshire, he was assigned to the aspirantate at Pallas-kenry, Limerick in Ireland. He spent two years there and completed his prenovitiate preparation in Cowley, Oxford. After his religious profession at the end of his novitiate in 1936 he began his philosophical studies, but these were interrupted when, after only one year, he was asked to help disadvantaged boys in the Canon Craven Boys' Home at Enfield, London. After spending two years there he was able to resume his studies in philosophy, at the same time studying for his degree in history, which he gained with honours. In 1941 John began his theological course in the theologate at Blaisdon, Gloucestershire, at the conclusion of which he was ordained by Bishop Lee on 15 July 1945.

John spent the next years teaching in such diverse places as Battersea, Bolton, Beckford and Cowley - all in England - but he became more and more convinced that his true calling lay with the wider apostolate of the parish. In addition to his teaching, John had undertaken many weekend supplies in various parishes, and this whetted his appetite for the full parish apostolate.

Father Livesey applied to come to Australia and, permission being granted, he arrived in Sydney in September 1966. There he began his work in the Salesian parish of Engadine with Father Joseph Ciantar as parish priest. To broaden his experience he served in parishes as far distant as Brunswick, Victoria; Yorketown, South Australia; and Townsville, Queensland. He even spent fourteen months in the Salesian province of New Rochelle, New York.

With all this experience Father came at the last to the parish of Brooklyn Park, South Australia in January 1978. This was to be his last assignment, and here he laboured until he was called to give an account of his stewardship on the Feast of the Holy Trinity, 21 May 1989.

John was a great traveller, and many a time did he regale his audience with tales of his adventures round Europe on a bicycle, trying to make himself understood in basic German, Italian or French. Here in Australia, as we have seen, he made his presence known in various places.

Above all, however, John Livesey was a great priest: one near and dear to the heart of his divine Master, Jesus Christ. He was fearless in his adherence to, and proclamation of, the great truths of our faith. Like Saint Paul, he preached Christ in season and out of season with conviction and sincerity. One of the parishioners wrote: "I can sincerely say that Father Livesey's inspiration has confirmed and encouraged my faith, which in so many others is eroded by destructive beliefs and attitudes, and the pervading barrage of heresy and misconception. Father Livesey was a humble and dynamic priest completely absorbed in the faith".

Like our Founder, Saint John Bosco, Father Livesey had a tremendous devotion to, and love of, the Mass and the Blessed Sacrament, and our Blessed Mother Mary. Only sickness would prevent him from celebrating the Sacrifice of the Mass each day and every day without fail he would recite the fifteen decades of the Holy Rosary. He was a man of prayer - a "sine qua non" for any priest - and not a day passed without his giving a significant part of it to mental and vocal prayer and to spiritual reading. Only severe pain would keep him from his place in the chapel for the community exercises. His attention to his priestly ministry was a byword in any of the parishes, especially to the sick and the elderly.

We read in the gospel narrative that the disciples wanted to turn the children away but the Master welcomed them. Towards the end of his days, John Livesey's great delight was to have the little ones come to read to him. Second childhood? Perhaps! But then the Master said: "Unless you become like little children you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven".

The Master also said: "Unless you take up your cross and follow me you cannot be my disciple". John Livesey showed himself a true disciple in this regard. In 1981 he was diagnosed as having a severe heart condition which necessitated having major surgery - a triple bypass. Such surgery left him very weak but he bore his infirmity with patience and acceptance. Long periods in various hospitals followed, none of any great benefit. Then, to complicate matters, he began to suffer pains in his hips and legs and this affliction became steadily worse with the passing of time.

A few weeks before his death, John was admitted to hospital in excruciating pain. The strain on his heart was too severe and at 3 o'clock on 21 May the Feast of the Most Holy Trinity, the soul of John Livesey passed from this vale of tears to the joys of heaven, having done his purgatory here on earth. No doubt the last words he heard were those of his Master: "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord".

Requiem Mass was offered up in the Church of Saint John Bosco here in Brooklyn Park. The corpse was then flown to Melbourne: after solemn Mass in the Rupertswood chapel at Salesian College Sunbury, the body of John Livesey was interred in the Salesian cemetery on Thursday 25 May.

THE BROOKLYN PARK COMMUNITY

FATHER JOHN LIVESEY SDB

Born 8 February 1914

Professed 5 September 1936

Ordained 15 July 1945

Died 21 May 1989