

HOMILY AT THE FUNERAL SERVICE IN THE PARISH OF ST. JOHN BOSCO, ROBERTSHAM, JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA, OF FR. MICHAEL JAMES POWER, SALESIAN OF DON BOSCO

Your Grace, Archbishop Buti, Fr. Francois Dufour, our Salesian Superior, Fr. Brian McGraw, Salesian and nephew of Fr. Michael, Salesian Confrères and Salesian Sisters, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, our visiting Priests and Religious, and you, the people of God – so dear to Fr. Michael. I wish, on behalf of all our Salesians, to welcome you all this morning and thank you and so many others who have offered prayer and condolences at Fr. Michael's death. The outflowing of love for him is overwhelming – but then he loved so much the people he was sent to serve and how he served! – He knew the meaning of Christ's words: "I have come not to be served but to serve" – Fr. Michael could never say "no" to a request for help or counselling. He spent himself for others – he was familiar with sacrifice.

Fr. Michael James Power, a Salesian of Don Bosco, was born in Glasgow, Scotland, on 12 June 1929, into a family of Patrick and Annie Power, the eldest of four children. His wonderful life ended on Friday, 20 November 2009, when the God he loved so much and served so faithfully called him home to rest. At eighty years of age, 60 years as a Salesian Religious and fifty years a Priest, he was ready to give an account of his life lived to the full and enjoyed, which had enriched the lives of so many over the years and in various apostolates and countries. He said to me a few days before he died, after I had administered to him the Sacrament of the Sick, "Now, I'm ready for the journey".

Michael's life gave great joy to so many. He loved life and he knew how precious the Gift of Life is and he made it his business to honour other people's lives, to give them dignity and to uplift the lives of the many poor, the marginalized, the elderly and sick, and in a special way the young, to whom he gave the greater part of his life of service as a Salesian, after the heart of St. John Bosco's charism – love for the young – which God called him to and to which he responded so generously.

That call came at the age of 12 Years to Fr. Michael – and he decided to respond to that call in 1942 during the Second World War – we were more mature then – when he entered the Salesian Missionary College in England – leaving his beloved Scotland – for the first time. On the 8th September 1948 he professed his first Vows and began his Priestly studies which culminated in his Ordination to the Salesian Priesthood in 1959 by Bishop Rudderham, at Melchet Court in the Diocese of Clifton. Knowing Fr. Michael's love for his sharing in Christ's Priesthood and his great respect for the privilege given him, there must have been a tinge of sorrow that his mother and father had died the year before his ordination, but he had a wonderful family to support him on his journey.

For close on 20 years Fr. Michael taught in our schools and Colleges in the United Kingdom. He was well equipped and able for this as he had obtained a Degree in Sacred Theology during his Priestly Studies and in his Teacher Training years and had acquired an external Degree in English from Oxford University, teaching during the day, studying at night. He was no slouch when it came to hard work and sacrifice to fulfill his duties. During this period, he was also Sports Master with many extramural activities thrown in.

He was called after these many years of teaching to take on the role of Administrator as First Community Bursar/Economer and then as Superior of his old Alma Mater at Shrigley where his journey had begun in 1942 – guiding the young students on their journey to the Salesian and Priestly Life, which he did for six years. Then his first return to his homeland of Scotland as Vocations Director, and promotion of our Salesian Works was given to him and here he endeared himself to so many who have never forgotten him for his enthusiasm for the work of Don Bosco. He later returned to Scotland to care for Bosco House in Glasgow for one year and for six years as Parish Priest in Easter House, Glasgow, where his nephew Brian is Parish Priest today.

Before he was appointed to Parish Work, Michael was “in the office” as he often referred to it for 10 years as Salesian Economist for the Province of Great Britain which called for responsibility of Property and Development – buying and selling – raising funds for our work in Sierra Leone, Liberia (which was twice destroyed in civil wars – but restored again) and setting up a financial system to sustain our works which continues successfully to this day. He set up funding that eventually allowed the Salesians in the United Kingdom to build our Frail Care Centers for our elderly Salesians in Bolton and Farnborough. This last task was very dear to his heart – the sick and elderly Confrères. Fr. Jim Gallagher another Scottish Salesian, wrote me: “I think I can rightly say that our Scottish Salesians are especially grateful to Fr. Michael for all he did to further devotion to Don Bosco and make the Salesian name so well known”.

After a triple heart by-pass in 1994, Fr. Michael came to Cape Town to recuperate at the wishes of his Superior. For a few months he did little and got tired of doing nothing and volunteered his services to work in Parishes in Mitchell’s Plain – first in Lentegour and then in Rocklands where he served for six years before being called back to the United Kingdom to serve as Parish Priest in St. Richards, Bootle, Liverpool. In 2003 while there on leave, I met Fr. Michael whose Parish had just been amalgamated with another, and asked him what his next move was. He dreaded the thought of retirement at 73 and so with the blessing of the Superior in the United Kingdom and South Africa, we acquired his services at Robertsham for these past seven years, where he joined me in an idyllic partnership, a wonderful team called together to serve you here in this Parish.

The warmth of his humanity shone through in many simple ways; those of us who had the privilege of sharing Salesian Community life with him so much part of our spirituality – will remember his spirit of service, generosity and wonderful sense of humour, his love for our social life in being together and a sense of sincere compassion for those in need or sorrow and a love of celebration. The spirit of Don Bosco shone through him.

And how will you my dear people, who he loved so much remember him? I am sure as a true friend, a kind human being, a dedicated Priest, a real servant for all and a deep spiritual being – a spirituality that touched everyone. He was always saying how generous you all were and how grateful he was to you. You made his seven years of his life some of the happiest.

A little personal touch if you will bear with me. I met Fr. Michael in 1946 when I entered the Salesian Missionary College where he was in syntax in fourth year – I was just beginning. Even then he stood out as a wonderful example, with so many others like Fr. John Coleman, Fr. Ivo Pisacane: these pointed the way for us to emulate. Twenty-six years later, Michael as Rector of our Alma Mater at the Mission College hosted my Ordination to the Priesthood in 1972. When Michael joined me here – remember I had been on my own for two years after the death of Fr. Andrew Wills – one of the first things he wanted to make clear was that I was the Parish Priest and he was my assistant – he did not want me cow-towing to him because he was older and more experienced. It never caused a problem, we were a true partnership and may I say we never in seven years had a disagreement – a record for Priests living together!!! I put this down to the fact that we prayed together every morning, at midday and in the evening completing it all with the Rosary – he taught me a lot about prayer and community prayer, at the end of the day we would watch some TV together, share the happenings of the day and prepare for the next day and have a wee drop of whiskey which we both appreciated and it warmed the cockles of our hearts.

You will all have your memories of Fr. Michael as I have – let us accompany him to God's presence with our prayers. I want to offer the sincere and heartfelt sympathy of all of us to Fr. Michael's family and thank them for the gift that he was to us and everywhere he served.

I want to quote what Fr. Francis Preston wrote on hearing of Michael's death: "Just a couple of weeks ago Michael was relishing the experience of visiting the sights of the earthly Jerusalem for the first time – now, perhaps more quickly than he could have expected, Michael is enjoying the delights of the heavenly Jerusalem, where God lives among His people: that city did not need the sun or the moon for light, since it was lit by the radiant glory of God and the Lamb was a lighted torch for it". I am sure it is a glory Michael is now experiencing. May Fr. Michael rest in peace. Go with God Michael, you will be missed and thanks for the memories.

