

Tribute to Fr Michael (and Canice)

I could not believe it when Fr Canice phoned me on Friday night 10 days ago, to give me the sad news that Fr Michael had died some moments earlier. I had visited him each evening in hospital, and although there must have been reasons why he was being kept under permanent monitoring in the acute care ward of Milpark hospital, I never dreamed the end could be so nigh. He was in such good spirits, and each evening before I left, he humbly asked me to pray a blessing over him. I was the one who felt humbled. Each time I prayed that he would rapidly be able to regain on the strength needed to continue to serve the Lord for many more years...

I am just glad that the Lord spared him any languishing illness, and recalled him to paradise well prepared and without the distress of a lengthy affliction. Thank you for all the condolences offered to me and my confreres from near and far, in the past days. We are all bereaved though, and so expressions of condolences are reciprocal.

Fr Michael, even if he was 80 and deserved to have retired several years ago, was still very active in ministry. So he leaves a gap here in the parish and in our Southern African salesian province. We will miss him, not only for what he did, but especially for his splendid modelling of salesian consecrated life. If we add up 80 years of life really well live, 60 years of religious life and 50 years of priesthood it totals an impressive honours report card – passed *suma cum laude* or *plus quam optime!* We cannot doubt that he is enjoying the bliss of seeing God face to face. Having been delighted with his visit for the first time to the earthly Jerusalem two weeks before he died, he now has the even better elation of a place in the heavenly Jerusalem forever.

Michael brings to 5 the number of confreres we have buried in the last 14 months. While the number of salesian saints in heaven keeps increasing, the number of bodies to assist in continuing Don Bosco's mission in this part of the world keeps diminishing. May they all enjoy the benefits of those who see God face to face, but I pray that they may keep interceding for vocations to our salesian family in Southern Africa.

Apart from giving thanks to God for the great gift Fr Michael has been to us all, I want to also thank Fr Canice who was instrumental in coaxing Michael to come "retire" out here 7 years ago, and then for forming such a fabulous duo of priests to serve this parish. Canice and Michael provided us priests and religious with proof that it is possible to work, pray, play, minister, serve, ...together, like married couples, in pairs, in unity, in mutual respect. In the past three years, observing their symbiotic teamwork, has given me hope that it is possible for us celibate clergy and religious to not only just get along and put up with each other, but to give witness to harmonious community life.

St Paul wrote to the Romans – "Let your love be genuine... Love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honour. Practice hospitality. **Live in harmony with one another.**" Michael and Canice have done just that.

And a couple of extracts from our Salesian constitutions challenge us (49): "To live and work **together** is for us salesians a fundamental requirement and sure way of fulfilling our vocation. **This is why we come together** in communities where our love for each other leads us to share all we have in a family spirit and so create communion between person and person."

I wish to thank you Fr Canice for having put those principles into practice with Fr Michael. May your example be an inspiration to the rest of us, your confreres.

Michael, may you now rest in the heavenly community, in the communion of saints. Amen. Hamba Kahle!

Francois Dufour
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