

APRIL 27, 1989 Fr. Robert Duggan, CM



Fr Robert Duggan died peacefully in Adelaide on April 27, 1989, after a long struggle with cancer. He was in his seventy-ninth year. He was born in Ireland (July 29, 1910), his family belonging to the (Anglican) Church of Ireland. He came to New Zealand as a very young boy, following his father there. He became part of a new and loving family, went to Sacred Heart Marist Brothers College at Ponsonby, Auckland, and became a Catholic at the age of eleven. He left New Zealand to come to Australia at the age of seventeen, joining the Vincentian Congregation in Sydney, being received on March 9, 1928. He took vows on March 10, 1930, and was ordained in St Mary's Cathedral, Sydney, by Archbishop M. Sheehan, on November 24, 1934.

He studied Canon Law in Rome for three years after his ordination. Subsequently he spent thirty-two years in the training and education of young men for the Diocesan priesthood, including his last years of retirement at St Francis Xavier Seminary, Adelaide. To this can be added another sixteen years training and educating Vincentian students. His fifty-four years of priestly ministry were spent predominantly training men for the priesthood at Mosgiel (New Zealand), at St Joseph's, Eastwood, NSW, and at St Francis Xavier's Seminary, Adelaide. He spent some four years in parish work (Rockhampton, Qld) – which he probably loved best of all – and one year (1945) teaching at St Stanislaus' College, Bathurst. He had a clear conviction of what it means to be, and to live, as a Vincentian; to live a simple life style; to be compassionate and understanding, while remaining loyal to Christian standards, and to put the needs of individuals in difficulties before all else. He was keenly aware of the need to reach out to those whom he perceived to be lonely or in need of care.

When distance prevented face to face contact, he wrote letters regularly, even in the last months of his life. Contact with, and care for his family in New Zealand was maintained through letters, particularly to his half sister, Marie, to whom he wrote every week. Marie came to Adelaide on two occasions during Fr Duggan's final months, spending some time with him and the Vincentian community.

He regretted not having had more opportunity to exercise his apostolate among young people. He loved their zest for life; he shared willingly in, and avidly fostered, their hopes for the future; he listened compassionately to their accounts of failure and focused their vision on their successes and their future. In the early months of Modbury parish, in Adelaide, he regularly celebrated the children's liturgy, and, after his retirement from seminary teaching in 1981, he willingly undertook, relished and enjoyed an apostolate at Kildare College, Adelaide, as a teacher of Religious Studies and as Chaplain. During these years he also undertook chaplaincy work at Modbury Hospital, a ministry he regretted he had not been involved in until late in his life.

(From "Echoes of St Stanislaus", and Homily at Funeral Mass)