

Fr Patrick Martin Ahern SDB

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23rd January 2009

Patrick Martin was born on the 10 November, 1930 in Kerry. He was professed on the 8 September, 1951 and ordained on the 3 July, 1960. Apart from a few years teaching mathematics in Lansdowne, Pat spent all his priestly life in Swaziland.

The then Rector of the community and his friend of forty years, Fr Larry McDonnell preached the panegyric and what follows is an extract:

"When a person of Pat's stature leaves us our community is damaged, lessened, weakened; a vital, living, contributing part of our living together is missing. We are confronted by an empty space, it cannot be filled, the presence of Pat was unique. There was the empty space at Salesians - the empty chair, the empty classroom, the empty heart, the empty life [...] At this level alone, we can fill the spaces in our community left by Pat [...] There is the empty space in the hearts of those who benefitted from Pat's unique skills at the passing on in the classroom of useful knowledge, genuine faith, touching humanity. His individual interpretation of the Salesian educational system - was a Bosco basic - real education is not what you put into youth, but what you can draw out from young minds. His education psychology was his Kerry simplicity - that for many might be a contradiction in terms; his educational methodology was his Salesian faith in the young mind, his classroom management was his endless storytelling, his discipline was his Ahern smile! There remains a respectful empty space in the minds of the many who followed his preaching, his Mass, his praying. There was a Christ-like camouflaged naivety in his presentation of the Word. His readiness to fill in the endless demanding gaps in the pastoral requests that so often came his way was nothing short of heroic. Most observed is the empty space Pat left in the social life of our community. He looked , spoke, laughed like the classical image of the monastic guest master. The many visitors who sought his help, knew that the waiting time at the front door was never more than five minutes - he was bound to pass within that time, always enquiring about how he could help".

Pat died of cancer, after a few days in the hospital in Nelspruit. His concelebrated Requiem Mass was led by his friend and past student - Bishop Louis Ncamiso Ndlovu - in a packed Manzini Cathedral, before being laid to rest in St Joseph's cemetery. The refrain of the hymn, sung at the graveside, 'O! Hamba Kahle' echoed loudly round the hills and beyond.

He was 79

Fr Martin Ryan

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12th January 2009

2008