

Rev Fr James Johnson, C.S.S.R. († 1886)

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The Freeman's Journal of February 9th, 1886, in announcing the death of Father Johnson, published a notice which was written by Very Rev Canon Daniel, P.P., Francis-street, Dublin, and which we reprint here:

"We announce with deep regret the death of the above-named zealous and widely esteemed priest. Father Johnson died in the afternoon of Sunday in the House of his Order in Dundalk, surrounded by a large number of his brethren in the ministry, and blessed with all the consolations of religion. He had attained a ripe age, and although humble and unostentatious beyond measure, he leaves behind him a goodly record of solid work done for father and country.

He was a native of the diocese of Ferns, but received his education in the College of Kilkenny. At the close of his collegiate course he was selected for the position of Editor of the *Wexford People*, and for the five years of his editorship many of the ablest, most spirited and patriotic articles that appeared in its columns came from his pen. He abandoned worldly pursuits after his resignation of the Editorial Chair, and prepared himself for the Priesthood.

Since his ordination his life has been one of active, laborious, and fruitful missionary toil, and during his thirty years of membership of the Redemptorist Congregation he has preached and left memorials of his ardent zeal in nearly every part of Ireland. Thousands to whom his form and voice have been familiar will affectionately remember the good and gentle Father Johnson, and pay back the tribute of their thankfulness for much holy work done by him for them, in fervent prayers for his soul.

Father Johnson, as missionary, was called into the vineyard late in life, he would himself say that he was called at the eleventh hour. Be that as it may, he certainly laboured more than many who began in the early morning of life. From his ordination until his death he never sought any relaxation; his one thought was to save souls. In the twenty-five years he worked as a Redemptorist priest, he gave 192 Missions and renewals, and many retreats to all classes of people. He was nearly always occupied with our own people, whether he was in in England and Scotland, or in Limerick or Dundalk. He worked to the very last.

During 1885 he had given Missions as usual. He had finished a heavy retreat in Dublin just in time to return to his Community for Christmas. The year 1886 found him wearied out, but with no desire to give up his fight against sin. While preaching to others he did not neglect himself.

Hence, he began his own yearly retreat of ten days on the 18th of January. He went through all the exercises for five days when, finding his strength fail him, and fearing he might not profit of the holy exercises as he desired, he asked the Father Rector to allow him to reserve five days for another time. His request was readily granted. The next day, Saturday, Feast of the Espousals of the Blessed Virgin Mary, he said Holy Mass at the Altar of Our Mother of Perpetual Succour. This was his last Mass. On the evening of that day he took to his bed, never to leave it again.

Father Johnson was a model of humility, piety, and charity to all his brothers in religion during the twenty-nine years which he spent in the Congregation. He was, above all, a model in his devotion to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, and to Our Mother of Perpetual Succour. At home and on Mission he would spend his free time before the Tabernacle, or at an Altar of Our Blessed Lady. In Jesus and Mary he placed all his hopes for his own salvation, and from them he sought that grace with which he touched the most hardened sinners.

His desire to do homage and reparation to Jesus Christ ever present on the Altar caused him to take great



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interest in, and give much encouragement to a number of devout souls in Limerick, who had formed themselves into a community for the special purpose of keeping up a constant adoration before the Most Holy Sacrament. These pious efforts were well rewarded, for it was this humble beginning that led to the introduction into the city of the Order of Marie Reparatrice, a Community of nuns whose lives are wholly given up to the devotion Father Johnson had so much at heart.

The virtues and devotions of his life were the virtues and devotions of his last days. He received Holy Communion every morning and would count the hours until Our Lord would visit him again. Sometimes he would slumber in the evening and when he awoke his first request was for Holy Communion; and when he was informed it was evening, he would say: "Welcome be the Will of God." He hungered for the Bread of Life and God satisfied his longings to the very end. His mind and his heart were frequently turned towards the Tabernacle. He had the Picture of Our Mother of Perpetual Succour near his bed and he entertained himself with his Blessed Mother with as loving a familiarity as if he saw her.

One day after his confession, turning to the picture, he said: "It is she who will do everything for us." On the fifth day of his illness the doctors declared that it was mortal, and that the end might come very soon. He then received the last Sacraments with the greatest devotion. Henceforth all his thoughts were for God, and he prayed constantly until his weakness became extreme, then he kept himself calmly recollected.

He passed away so quietly and sweetly that it was some time before those present could be sure that the soul of this most zealous missionary had gone to be judged by the Supreme Pastor, Jesus Christ. †