

# Rev Fr James Connolly, C.S.S.R. (1822 – 1891)

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Father Connolly was beloved by his religious brethren, as he was always cheerful and charitable, and ever sought to make those around him happy. The following account of his life and funeral is from a newspaper of the time:

“The deceased Redemptorist Father had just entered his seventieth year, having been born on the 26th of May, 1822. Father Connolly was a native of Sligo. As a boy he was remarkable for great piety, quickness of understanding, and love of study. Already in the preparatory college of his native diocese, he was a remarkable student, and passed a brilliant examination on his entrance to Maynooth. In the Alma Mater of the Irish priesthood he pursued his classical studies with great diligence, and under the direction of some of the most illustrious of those professors, whose names have shed such lustre on Maynooth, he became intimately acquainted with all the masterpieces of Pagan literature, and to his latest day he could discourse about all the known Greek and Latin authors with the ease of a master. But it was as a Theologian that Father Connolly most distinguished himself.

“When his ordinary course was finished he was promoted to the Dunboyne foundation, where he spent two years. The studious habits of his early life remained with him to the end, and no sooner was he home from a Mission or retreat, than he was to be seen in his cell or in the library, surrounded by several large volumes of the Greek and Latin Fathers. He was especially fond of studying St. John Chrysostom. A classical scholar and a Theologian, Father Connolly forgot not the melodious Celtic tongue of his beloved Connaught. He studied the Irish language carefully, and during the long years of his missionary life he was continually called upon to preach and hear confessions in his native tongue.

“Ordained on May 17th, 1856, he laboured as a secular Priest, in the diocese of Elphin, for about seventeen years, and for many years discharged the duties of Administrator. He joined the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer in 1872. He was stationed for several years in the various houses in Ireland, England and Scotland.

“For nearly twenty years Father Connolly had laboured incessantly giving missions and retreats, until old age and infirmity began to weigh upon him. He was possessed of a voice of singular strength and clearness, and his sermons were remarkable for their simplicity, solidity, and power. During the last ten years of his life his work consisted for the most part in giving retreats to the clergy, religious communities, and colleges.

“Although growing feeble from the weight of years, Father Connolly worked up to the end. During the Lent of the present year he took part in a Mission at Youghal. Soon after he was at a Mission in Aghlish, Co. Waterford. Then he conducted a retreat for the clergy of the diocese of Galway, Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora, at Lisdoonvarna; on his return home he offered himself to help at the renewal of a Mission at Newtown Sandes in Kerry. When the work was near its end Father Connolly complained of being unwell. Dr. Dillon, who was called in, declared from the first that his illness would probably prove fatal at such an advanced age. When his fellow-missioners returned to Limerick, Rev. Father Moynahan went at once to take care of the invalid, and nothing could equal the kindness and attention of the Rev. Father Dillon, P.P., Newtown Sandes, to the dying Father and his companion.

“When he heard that his case was hopeless, ‘Blessed be the Holy Will of God,’ answered Father Connolly, ‘I have been preparing to hear this news for seven and thirty years.’

“He spent all the time that remained to him in prayer, and received the last Sacraments on Tuesday, May 26th, his sixty-ninth birthday, and on Friday, at four o’clock in the afternoon, he passed painlessly away. Well might he exclaim as he gave up his beautiful soul to God: ‘I have fought the good fight I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.’

“He was, pre-eminently, a man of faith; for him there was no such thing as chance. In every, even the most insignificant event, he recognized the dispensation of Divine Providence, from his spirit of faith sprang his unbounded confidence in the power of prayer, and his almost constant communion with God. In one word, everyone who knew Father Connolly, declared that he was, undoubtedly a holy man. He has now passed away,

and as a finished classical scholar, a Theologian, an adept in the Irish language, a man of boundless experience and uncommon sanctity, he was an ornament to the diocese from which he went forth, an ornament to the Congregation of which he was so long a member, and he was an ornament to his country." R.I.P. †