

# Rev. Fr John O'Connell, C.S.S.R. (1841-1899)

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That the impression, which the active life of Rev. Father John O'Connell, and his glorious death, made on the people of Limerick was profound, is most certain. It is rare that a death calls forth an expression of veneration greater than that manifested, when it was announced that Father O'Connell was called away while dispensing the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ in the sacred tribunal of Penance.

On the Sunday that followed his death we find the preacher in the pulpit begging the people to bow their heads to the Will of God. His expression of thanks to all classes in Limerick tells something of the high esteem in which the Father was held: "God took him from us," he said, "that we might all, first the Community and then the whole Province – for the whole Province feels his loss – make an act of submission to His Holy Will. We do make it, and we say with our whole hearts: 'Thy Will be done.' But our resignation does not prevent our feeling deeply the loss. It is now my duty to thank you in the name of the Community for the great sympathy shown us by all, without exception, and through you I thank innumerable friends from every part of the country who are absent and who sent words of sympathy to us.

I thank above all and before all his Lordship the Most Rev. Dr. O'Dwyer, who showed us the greatest kindness. He was one of the first to visit our stricken Father, and when all was over he was the first, after ourselves, to say a prayer by the side of his body for the repose of his soul. I thank all the clergy of the city, whom you saw coming in such numbers to the Office and Mass for his soul. I thank all those Priests who came from distant parishes of the diocese to the Solemn Requiem. I thank the chief magistrate and councillors of the city who expressed their condolence in the most marked manner by words of kindest sympathy and by their presence at the obsequies. Lastly, I thank the faithful people of Limerick, high and low, young and old, whose sympathy could not be greater, who came to pray for our late Father Rector. I thank all with my whole heart, and I pray Our Lord and His Blessed Mother to reward them."

Nor was the manifestation of touching esteem less in Clapham, where he had laboured, than it was in Limerick.

John O'Connell was born on the 8th of January, 1841, in Mullingar. Always bright and amiable, he endeared himself to his parents and friends. When it became certain that he had a vocation to the priesthood, he was sent to Paris, and having completed his studies, he was ordained Priest, on the 22nd of May, 1866. He was appointed to the curacy of Rahan first, and later to one in Navan.

His success was remarkable, and yet he was not satisfied. God was calling him to the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer. Many difficulties lay in his path, but having overcome all he entered the Novitiate at Bishop Eton, in 1875, and made his religious profession a year later, on 25th January, 1876. After a rest of about a year and a half he began again his active ministry, and ceased only when called to his reward.

The principal scene of his labours, before coming to Limerick, was St. Mary's Clapham. It is not too much to say that he endeared himself to everyone, laboured incessantly, and laid the foundation of many good works.



*Rev. Fr John O'Connell, C.S.S.R.*



*Most Rev. Bishop O'Dwyer*

He came to Limerick in 1884. Here too, his labours were incessant. He was not a great preacher, but he was full of heart, persuasive, sympathetic, practical, and thus his discourses produced great fruit. He was a great Confessor. He devoted to hearing confessions all the time specified by the rule, and all the time he could spare. Not unfrequently he spent ten hours of the day in the confessional. It was in the confessional the disease of the heart, of which he died, manifested itself.

His first break-down was during a heavy mission in St. Michan's, Dublin. His case was then pronounced serious, and the higher Superiors did everything in their power to restore him to health. It looked for a while as if they had succeeded, and he returned to his post in Limerick. He was allowed to do a little work, but Father O'Connell was not a man to economize his strength. He gave himself to the work of the confessional nearly as unsparingly as before.

On the morning of 22nd January, 1889, he seemed well, transacted much business regarding the Holy Family Confraternity, and when went to his confessional. He had heard just one confession when he was struck down. He was carried helpless to his room, and received Extreme Unction and the last Blessing. Notwithstanding all the efforts of Doctors Malone and Kane, he breathed his last about 4 p.m. His death was indeed sudden, but not, blessed be God! Unprovided; and the author of this necrology believes that if he had had a choice, he would have chosen to be called away while exercising that function of the sacred ministry, to which he had devoted himself with such admirable zeal and success. †