

Memories of Fr John Lawrence C.Ss.R

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Fr John Lawrence, who died in Bishop Eton in 1970.

He was an Irishman who was ordained as a diocesan priest in Ireland and after a few years in parish work joined the Redemptorists. But he joined the Redemptorists in England, I don't know, why rather than in Ireland.

He spent some time as a missionary giving Parish Missions here in England, and spent a fair number of years in South Africa. It was only after he returned from South Africa that I knew him, at a time when he was certainly elderly. He was made Rector of Bishop Eton.

He was noted here as a preacher but his peculiarity was that in every sermon that he preached here in Bishop Eton Church, he would at some point in the sermon use the expression 'When I was in South Africa' and give some anecdote about his life and work in South Africa. But perhaps to understand the dramatic style of his preaching the best story that I heard, and I was there as an altar server, listening to him preach which was when he preached about the mustard seed. And he explained to the congregation how this mustard seed was the smallest seed that could ever be found in this world, and it was planted in the ground and it began to grow, and it grew, and it grew, and it grew into the greatest oak tree the world has ever seen.

As I say Fr. Lawrence was a rather dramatic preacher but he lived till he was about 85 and he lost the power of preaching as he got older.

In his old age here at Bishop Eton, the last ten years or so of his life, the Rectors that he had then were very good, they gave him what he wanted, a glass of sherry after his supper at night which he could take to his room and just have a little nightcap. He refused to keep a bottle of sherry in his room even though it was offered. He asked the Rector to keep it in his room and then John would go along with a glass, have the glass filled, go back and drink it, and then normally at that time, but occasionally at other times during the day he would take his mission cross and just quietly walk round the corridors where the rooms were occupied by members of the community, and outside each door, he didn't knock on the door or go in, but outside each door he would give a blessing, the sign of the cross with his mission cross, and then return to his own room and go to bed.

I've just remembered another quote from Fr. Lawrence.

He used to fast(?) about his Novitiate, sum up his Novitiate

Oh by the way before he went to the Novitiate he was ordained as a diocesan priest and worked for a couple of years in Ireland before joining our province.

So during the novitiate he used to say the novice master considered him clever enough and educated enough to say Mass every day, but he was far too stupid to sweep a corridor correctly.