



REV. FRANCIS DOMINIC McSHANE (1868-1938)

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## FATHER McSHANE, O.P.

NORBERT WENDELL, O.P.



STORY is told of St. Alphonsus who, toward the end of his life, was threatened with the loss of his reason. "What will the world say," muttered the lay-brother who watched by the sick man's side, "what will the world say if Monsignor Ligouri should go out of his mind?" But the old Saint was listening as he dozed. "And what," he answered, "if it be God's will that Monsignor Ligouri should go out of his mind?"

Blessed Gemma Galgani entertained similar sentiments as regards the will of God. The young girl was on her deathbed in great agony when her director, Father Germanus, came to see her. Knowing the strict obedience she paid him as her director, the holy Passionist said to her: "But I do not wish you to die yet." Gemma looked up at the priest and replied: "And should Jesus wish it, what then?"

The same sweet and holy will of God was the all important consideration in the life and death of the late lamented Francis Dominic McShane, O.P. Those who knew him, and especially those who were associated with him, can testify how often words of resignation passed his lips. Particularly was this true during his last illness when the hand of God lay heavy upon him. It is when human weakness is most apparent that Divine grace works best. Truly it can be said of Father McShane that he was "perfected in adversity." The Very Rev. E. G. Fitzgerald, O.P., a lifelong friend of Father McShane, touched upon this point in the beautiful sermon he delivered at the funeral. "During the long months of painful illness Father McShane

gave to us all a lesson of resignation to the will of God. The burden of his prayer was 'Thy will be done.'

There was nothing singular about Father McShane. There were no 'frills' or 'airs' about him. He was just a plain, simple, devout, humble religious priest who devoted the fifty three years of his religious life to the service of God and his fellow men to the very best of his ability. He had some very definite intellectual gifts but was most careful never to flaunt them or parade them before others. The greater part of Father McShane's priestly career was spent in the Dominican Studium educating young men who represented the future priests of the Order. It was here that his abilities stood out in bold relief. He was known throughout the Order as an authority on the Sacred Sciences. To the education of future priests he gave all his time, all his talents. Today there are hundreds of Dominican priests, scattered over all parts of the world, who gratefully look to Father McShane as a true teacher of wisdom.

Father McShane had some truly rare qualities. No one, for example, ever heard him speak unkindly of another. In speaking of his neighbor he always managed to have something good to say about him. "Father ——? Yes, a wonderful man, a fine preacher—one of the best we have. Father ——? A real scholar. He worked very hard going through. Yes, and an excellent religious." One of the younger Dominicans who spoke to Father McShane about the qualities and abilities of our retreat masters just about came to the conclusion that all of them were blessed with the gift of tongues!

In common with the rest of mankind, Father McShane had his failings. His chief fault (if fault, indeed, it could be called) was his complete openness with others. He was sometimes frank to the extent of being positively point-blank. Where there was a question of truth involved, or when someone did something out of the way, he did not hesitate to tell the offender straight to his face and point out wherein lay the fault. It was noticed that those he rebuked were usually those he loved most. Special acts of kindness were almost sure to follow in the very near future.

Father McShane had a particular love for the young novices of the Order. During his last illness he had many opportunities to talk with them, to know them better and they to know him. Many a lesson he had taught them in the classroom over a period of more than thirty years but Father McShane's best lessons were taught, not from the rostrum, but from his bed of pain. These last lessons of his were formulated not so much in words as in example.

Old age very often is critical and intolerant of youth, looking on

them sometimes as usurpers and interlopers rather than as successors and younger brethren. There was none of this in the character of Father McShane. On the contrary he looked for and always predicted great things for the youth of the Order. Looking down from his vantage point of seventy years he saw the young Dominicans as being better equipped, better prepared and more able to do the work of Christ than he was. For Father McShane the young, twentieth century Dominican had ever so many "new worlds to conquer." This one fact alone explains why the young novices thought so much of him for, as the late Father Bede Jarrett once said, "nothing so charms young age as to find old age encouraging and tolerant."

A childlike devotion to the Blessed Mother of God and a special love for Blessed Martin de Porres, the Little Flower and St. Bernadette were the chief characteristics of his piety. He said he wanted to die on the Feast Day of the Apparition of the Blessed Virgin at Lourdes. Instead he was buried on that day. All his life Father McShane was especially attentive to his choir observances and particularly to the celebration of daily Mass. The last Mass he was able to say was on New Year's Day and afterwards he remarked to his server that he had begun the New Year right.

Father McShane was essentially a serious man, yet all his life he remained eminently human. He always kept contact with men and the ways of men, though he was far more conversant with the ways of God. However, even to the end of his life, he managed, as they say, "to keep both feet on the ground." In his late sixties he could and would show a youngster how to swing a baseball bat and would even, on occasions, try his hand at some decidedly old-fashioned tennis. He was interested in everything. One of the fondest memories the novices have of Father McShane is the picture of him, a dying man, only months this side of eternity, his trousers rolled up to the knees, wading barefoot on the shores of the Ocean and expressing as one of his keenest regrets that he was no longer able to swim in the roaring surf of the great Atlantic. Those who have known Father McShane cannot doubt that he has now come to rest on endless, eternal shores.