

Obituary for Father Des Power

Fr Des Power, who has died aged 91, was well known both as a teacher and a priest. He spent nearly thirty years teaching as a Brother of Christian Instruction (De La Mennais Brother) at schools in Shropshire, Southampton and Liverpool, before taking holy orders. In later life he reflected that his path to the priesthood might have come earlier if his family circumstances had been different. He described growing up in a Catholic family that practised the piety typical of the period in a very natural way. The influence of his devout mother, the prayers said together at home and the friendly relationships with the parish clergy all helped to nurture a religious vocation. Yet he sensed a certain diffidence on the part of his parents, given their financial circumstances, of entertaining any hope of a priestly vocation for one of their sons. It was a visiting Brother of Christian Instruction who provided the vocational catalyst in the Power household, with the result that his brother Cyril went to the Juniorate in Shropshire. Not surprisingly the young Desmond followed and, like his brother, was professed as a religious.

As a teacher he specialised in French and English. His former pupils speak very highly of him as an excellent teacher with a great sense of humour and always ready with an anecdote or two, characteristics that he would maintain in his later ministry as a parish priest. He was very active, too, in promoting exchange visits between France and England for both pupils and Brothers.

In his native Liverpool he is chiefly associated with St Francis Xavier's College, Woolton. He arrived at the college in 1972 to teach French and his arrival coincided with a period of significant change for the school. The Jesuits, who had run the school since its foundation, withdrew in 1974 and Brother Power was appointed headmaster. By this time, of course, he was an experienced teacher and had the requisite administrative capabilities for the headship, yet he became increasingly dissatisfied with these tasks. Rather wistfully he observed the more pastoral life of the school chaplain and thoughts of the priesthood surfaced once again. In 1979 he was accepted by Archbishop Worlock as a student for the priesthood and he resigned the headship. Though he left the De La Mennais Brothers at that time, he retained a deep affection for SFX College and the Brothers. Following his ordination he regularly celebrated Mass in the college and was a frequent visitor to the Brothers' community house. Indeed, the community at Woolton provided a tremendous support to him throughout his priestly ministry, not least in the years of his retirement and increasing infirmity.

Desmond Peter Power was born in Liverpool on 8th March 1929, the youngest of nine children born to Lawrence and Rose Power (née Graham). He was baptised at St Michael's Church, West Derby Road, on 31st March 1929 and received his early education at St Michael's School. Aged eleven he proceeded to St Joseph's College at Pell Wall Hall near Market Drayton, where his brother Cyril was already a pupil, and entered the novitiate in September 1944, taking the religious name of Brother Robert. He made his final profession as a brother in 1951 and from then until 1960 he taught Religious Instruction and French, firstly at Market Drayton and then at St Mary's College, Southampton. In 1960 he went up to Oxford to read Modern Languages and graduated four years later with a Master of Arts degree. After a year's tertianship in Jersey, he resumed teaching at Southampton, before transferring in 1972 to St Francis Xavier's College, Woolton. He was appointed headmaster at the college in 1974 and remained in post until 1979, when he began training for the priesthood.

His priestly formation lasted three years; one year at the Beda College, Rome (1979-1980) and two years at All Hallows, Dublin (1980-1982). He was ordained to the priesthood by Archbishop Derek Worlock at the Metropolitan Cathedral of Christ the King, Liverpool, on 26th June 1982. Following ordination he was appointed as assistant priest at St Joseph's, Leigh, and remained there for five years until his first appointment as parish priest at St Aidan's, Huyton, in August 1987. He resigned as parish priest in 1991 and was in residence at English Martyrs, Litherland, until September 1992, when he was appointed as parish priest at Twelve Apostles, Leigh. His final appointment came in September 1995, when he was appointed parish priest at St Paschal Baylon, Liverpool. There he spent ten happy years until his retirement in September 2005. In retirement he lived firstly at Our Lady of the Assumption, Gateacre, and then for several years in a flat close to Christ the King, Queens Drive, Liverpool. Towards the end of his life, as he became increasingly frail, he moved to Nazareth House, Crosby.