

LUX EDMUNDI: REFLECTION FOR MEMORIA OF BLESSED EDMUND IGNATIUS RICE

The various communities of the Christian Brothers and of the Presentation Brothers across the globe will honour their Holy Founder on or around Thursday, 5th May, 2016, his liturgical Commemoration, and the many and various people and groups who share the charism of Blessed Edmund and the mission of his brethren – including all of us in *Lux Edmundi* – will gladly join them.

For Blessed Edmund, 1816 was something of a mixed year. One of his greatest supporters, Bishop John Power of Waterford and Lismore, died on January 7th. It was he who, to a considerable degree, facilitated Blessed Edmund in the establishment of the aboriginal and undivided Society of the Presentation. His death was a blow to the Founder. It was, though, also in 1816 that a house of the Society was established in, respectively, Limerick and Thurles, the one in the Diocese of Limerick, the other, in the Archdiocese of Cashel and Emlly. One historian of the Brothers tells us that, on the opening of the house in Limerick, hundreds of pupils at the local Lancasterian school enrolled *en masse* with the Brothers, and that, in Thurles, the introduction of the Society was effected by the involvement of the Cahill brothers, who, with others, had previously lived there together as what the people called “monks”, i.e., lay-men who lived together in community but who were unbound by rule or by vow, free to go and come as they pleased, but who now entered the Society of the Presentation the better to serve the Lord, the Church and the poor.

It was also in 1816 that Archbishop Murray of Dublin, Fr. Kenney, SJ – founder of Clongowes Wood College in 1814 and a great friend of the Founder - and Br. Gerbaud Thomas, FSC, Superior General of the Brothers of the Christian Schools (the de la Salle Brothers) came across each other in Rome. The upshot of their encounter was that Br. Gerbaud gave Archbishop Murray a copy of the FSC Constitutions which, on returning to Dublin in 1817, Dr. Murray transmitted to the only Brothers then in his archdiocese (i.e., those at Hanover Street) who, in turn, passed it on to the Founder.

Blessed Edmund was involved throughout the year with the Commissioner for Charitable Donations and Bequests in relation to the Will of Bishop Power, and with the courts in a suit by which Archbishop Bray hoped to secure for the poor of Thurles a substantial legacy bequeathed for that purpose but, unfortunately, in terms that were not as unambiguous as they should have been.

There were, indeed, some Brothers who insinuated that, in thus involving himself in worldly affairs, Blessed Edmund was acting *ultra vires* his vocation and his office. It was, though, precisely through such involvement that the Founder established and maintained the Society, its houses, its schools, the loss of which would have so hurt the very children he and his confreres were meant to serve.

It bears repeating that, his Rules apart – which were largely copied from others - Blessed Edmund has left us no spiritual writings of his own. He has, though, left us, his correspondence. This – even his considerable correspondence with Rome - is about business. It still constitutes a powerful spiritual legacy to all who live his charism. The Rule of the Society of the Presentation insisted that perfection consists, not in doing extra-ordinary things, but in doing ordinary things extra-ordinarily well. For us who live in the world and work in schools, the stuff of everyday life is the stuff of holiness. We grow where we are planted and it is in doing our duty, at home and at school, that we will love God above all for his own sake and the neighbour as ourselves for the love of God.