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"There was the beloved Father Dowling, whose personal inspiration and whose recommendation of AA to the world did so much to make our Society what it is." Bill W. in *AA Comes of Age*



Father Edward Dowling

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FATHER Edward Dowling, the Jesuit priest who befriended AA, has been an off-and-on hobby with me for the past five or six years. With the help of his sister, I've tried to collect anecdotes and stories about this beloved priest, with the aim of writing a book eventually.

I have a special love for Father Dowling because he introduced my father to AA. My mother told me the story after I had joined the Fellowship. For the first ten years of my life, my father drank. Finally, he reached his bottom. When he did, he called Father Dowling, who referred him to an AA member in St. Louis. For the next ten years, my father was sober in AA. He never explained the program to me; yet I knew what drinking had done to him, and I also knew what wonderful things had happened in his life because of sobriety.

Unfortunately, my father died be-

fore I came into AA. It is one of my regrets that he was not alive to see that, though I don't think that I was a full-blown alcoholic while he was alive. I remember discussing this with Father Dowling at his office, not long before he died. "You know, Father, my dad never talked to me about AA."

"He didn't have to," Father Dowling said. "That's the legacy he left you. He showed you by his example what the answer to your problem was."

A Chicago newspaperman summed up Father Dowling's life neatly in the obituary he wrote for his paper: "In terms of the goods of this world, he was very poor. But never has there been a will filed in St. Louis Probate Court that left so much to so many people."

Father Dowling suffered from arthritis most of his adult life. He understood suffering and would go to any lengths to try to remove suffering from others. He was a great friend and spiritual adviser to Bill W. In a letter to me, Bill said, "Father Dowling was one of the greatest friends I shall ever know. His unexpected calls upon people in need have been legion—and I have often been a beneficiary. He never failed to look me up when he came to New York. He probably had more influence on my own spiritual life than any other person."

An old-timer in AA in St. Louis told me that Father Ed didn't pressure people into joining AA. He

was careful not to do that, because he believed it would discourage the alcoholic from joining AA later when he was convinced he had a drinking problem.

That old-timer's entrance into AA is typical of the Dowling approach. Father Ed called him on the phone. "Say, Bill [that wasn't really his name], there's a group of men meeting close to your office tonight. I wonder if you'd be interested in attending."

"I'm not interested," the alcoholic said. "I'm not convinced that I'm an alcoholic."

Twenty minutes later, Father Dowling called him again. This time he asked, "Would it be all right if two of those men came by to see you?"

"No," the alcoholic said. "A lot of people may be convinced that I'm drinking too much, but I'm not."

That was the last time Father Dowling called the man. Some time later, however, the man became convinced that he was an alcoholic. He called Father Dowling, was later received into the Fellowship, and became my father's sponsor.

After Father Dowling died, his friends recorded some of his talks. One excerpt concerns AA and suffering: "I think the AA movement has caught one of Christ's great teachings, that is, to take up one's cross daily. Dr. William Osier of Johns Hopkins had an adaptation of that, which Dale Carnegie is now using in his latest book on worry.

He called it 'the day-tight compartment,' that is, the self-denial involved in keeping our nose out of tomorrow and keeping our thoughts away from yesterday, so as to concentrate on today.

"Actually, I don't think there is a pain in the world which a person can't stand for one second. And that's about all we ever stand, actually. Who ever heard of two seconds happening in one second? I think there is a joy in the cross that is total—or it wouldn't be a cross. The greatest distinction made in religious training that I remember in my novitiate (which was typical, I guess, of a great many in asceticism

training) is between feelings and the will. You have the great example in the agony in the garden, where Christ's feelings were all opposed to going on.

"I think it's important to get a correct code of suffering. Someone has said, 'I admire the man who can take it.' I know that our Lord, when the mother of the sons of Zebedee asked Him whether they would have a good place in heaven, asked her in return whether they could take the chalice of suffering.

"Sometimes, prosperity can numb us into a smug stupidity. But we learn so much through suffering."

K. M., Webster Groves, Mo.