

# SACRAMENTO DIOCESAN ARCHIVES

Vol 2

Father John E Boll, Archivist

No 84

## Right Reverend Monsignor Thomas John Capel, Called Home to God

Printed in the *Catholic Herald* on Saturday, October 28, 1911



Photo from the Catholic Herald 1912

**Monsignor Thomas John Capel**  
1836 - 1911

*Sacramento sustained a severe shock* on Monday last when the sad tidings of Monsignor Capel's death were made public. This sense of personal loss which extends to many in the community, irrespective of all lines, including creed, was keener because there had been no premonitory indication of the impending blow.

The Monsignor delivered his customary Sunday morning instruction to the children at the 9 o'clock Mass and at night preached the first of a series of Sunday vesper conferences on the subject of "Holy Mass."

On both occasions he appeared to be even more than ordinarily well in health and mentally alert and cheerful. In his morning discourse he touched upon the importance of making our preparation for the reception of the last rites of the Church and of the efficacy of the sacrament in strengthening and fortifying the soul for its journey into eternity.

Likewise in the evening it was remarked that the preacher seemed unusually strong and forceful and delivered a most brilliant discourse on his favorite theme. He spoke to an audience much larger than the average attendance at the Sunday evening lecture in the Cathedral and was, at the conclusion of the service, when he returned to the Episcopal residence, in a most cheerful and happy frame of mind.

He visited briefly and chatted with the clergy in their rooms before retiring, and left instructions to be called in time to celebrate Mass, after the Bishop's Mass in the morning. It was shortly before 10 o'clock when he spoke his last cheery good night and entered his own apartment, from which he was never to emerge in life.

Before getting into bed, the Monsignor had prepared some pages of manuscript for the press. These were found upon his desk in his neat chirography and without a change or revision. He then arranged his clothing with care and retired. He must have fallen at once into a deep, peaceful sleep, for the covers of his couch were almost as smooth as if he had not been disturbed.

Shortly after 8 o'clock Monday morning, Father Ryan knocked gently at the door of the Monsignor's room, but without eliciting the prompt response which usually followed this summons. He did not think anything of it, as he knew the prelate had spent a strenuous day of work the day previous. A little later, he rapped again and when at quarter of nine, he tried for the third time to arouse the sleeper, he became alarmed. He then entered the chamber and found that the Monsignor had passed away apparently as he slept. The body was yet warm, and Father Ryan promptly discharged those priestly offices which conditions permitted. The Bishop's household was apprised of the sad event, and it was only a short time before the intelligence spread to the ends of the city and beyond. Rarely has an announcement of the unexpected taken off of a public man awakened such profound and universal grief as the death of Monsignor

Capel occasioned among all kinds of conditions of men in and around Sacramento. Expressions of grief were heard upon all sides, and all demarcations of race and creed and cast were obliterated in the common sorrow evoked by the passing of an eminently great and eminently good man.

### **The Funeral**

Arrangements were made without delay for the final services over the mortal remains of the distinguished prelate. These were planned in accordance with the known desires and simple tastes of the departed Monsignor in such matters. The parish societies became at once active in preparation for the funeral and the assistance of their members at spiritual exercises incident in the obsequies.

### **Lying in State**

On Tuesday morning the remains, encased in a handsome purple casket, were removed to the Cathedral, where they rested on a bier before the high altar outside the chancel rail. Until the hour fixed for the religious solemnities, the form of the venerable churchman lay in state, clothed in the vestments of his priestly office and wearing the insignia of his rank as domestic prelate of the Papal household. His noble countenance was placid of expression and in appearance the effect was that of untroubled slumber. During Tuesday, from early morning to far into the night, throngs of devout watchers offered their prayers by the side of the precious casket for the eternal repose of the revered friend and gentle apostle, the empty tenement of whose grand spirit reposed within its narrow confines.

Members of the Knights of Columbus, whose guest the Monsignor was to have been on Monday night, served as guard of honor to the beloved dead. Always, in the soft light of the tapers which shed their religious rays upon the sleeping form, there stood at the head of the bier two silent figures, bowed in a last sad service to the distinguished patron of their order. The members of the parish societies and confraternities were no less assiduous in their devotion to the memory of the departed.

All day long thousands of sorrowing friends, old and young, rich and poor, non-Catholic, Jew, Protestant, Agnostic, as well as Catholic, filed in slow, reverential procession, passing the casket and taking a last loving look at the handsome features which never more forever were to be seen again on earth. There were few dry eyes in the long lines that encircled the throne of the loved dead. The innocent devotion of the children in paying their last tribute of love to their cherished friend and counselor; was one of the touching features of the scene.

On Tuesday night all the Catholic societies of the parish and city visited the Cathedral in succession and, led by their respective chaplains, publicly recited their office for the dead. The Knights of Columbus, Y.M.I., and the Y.L.I., and the A.O.H. and Ladies Auxiliary, the Sodalities, Children of Mary and other pious confraternities assisted in this beautiful demonstration of Catholic faith and Catholic devotion. It was an impressive

and touching scene that will not be soon forgotten by those who witnessed it. It was such a one, too, that would have appealed most strongly to the simple piety of the great soul in whose behalf it was invoked.

### **Bishop Grace Officiated**

Long before the hour set for the Requiem service, the neighborhood of the Cathedral came a theater of much activity. Crowds of men, women and children converged upon the big church from all points, and by the time the procession of clergy proceeding the bishops emerged from the sacristy to recite the office of the dead, every seat in the vast auditorium were occupied and hundreds who could not be accommodated stood in the spacious aisles. The large concourse was admirably handled by the ushers and perfect order prevailed.

Among those who assisted at the obsequies within the Cathedral were some of the most prominent persons of the city and state, ministers of different denominations, judges, lawyers, professional men and men of affairs in all walks of life, and a multitude of the obscurest people whom the honored dead during many years past had befriended spiritually and otherwise. A large gathering of converts from the leading homes of the city and vicinity testified to the fruitful activity of this servant of God. In a field, where nearly a half a century ago, he won almost unique distinction in another quarter of the globe.

The school children of the city mustered by the Christian Brothers and teaching Sisters of the several orders were accorded precedence at the funeral. The societies of men and women attended in a body with their funeral insignia and the whole population of Sacramento was strongly represented in the cosmopolitan congregation which thronged the church.

There were in the sanctuary priests from all portions of the diocese and some from abroad. The Rt. Rev. Bishop read the office of the dead, assisted by the assembled clergy.

### **Solemn High Requiem Mass**

At the conclusion of the office, the Rt. Rev. Bishop vested for Mass. He was assisted by Rev. J.H. Ellis, deacon; Rev. P. Ryan, subdeacon; Rev. Thomas Hayes, master of ceremonies; Brother Edwin, assistant master of ceremonies, and a long retinue of servers and acolytes. The following clergy assisted within the sanctuary: The Rev. Fathers Wallrath, Coleman, Andreas, O'Reilly of Nevada City, O'Kane, Nugent, Tubman, Horgan of Truckee, Dermody of Goldfield, Horgan of Placerville, Grealy, Murphy, Dermody of Oroville, Brady, Taverna, Gartland, Meehan, Horgan of Sparks, McGrath, Gualco, Kearney, the Franciscan Fathers from St. Francis Church, Hunt, W.F. Ellis, Mela, Sasia, SJ, and Wyman, C.S.P., provincial of the Paulists on the coast.

The music was one of the most impressive features of the ceremonies. An augmented choir under the direction of Miss Lizzie M. Griffin, organist, and Mrs. Emma Coppersmith, soprano, chanted the *Mass of Decio Monti*. "Lux Aeterna" at the post Communion was sung by the Cathedral quartet. At the commencement of the service, "Lead, Kindly Light," a favorite hymn of the Monsignor was played softly on the organ.

Other organ numbers were Bach's "*When Grief Thy Soul Distresses, in One Thou Mayst Confide,*" and Mendelssohn's "*Funeral March.*"

The full choir was as follows: Miss Lizzie M. Griffin, organist; Mrs. Emma Coppersmith, Soprano; Mrs. Robert H. Hawlely, contralto; Walter Longbotham, tenor; Joseph G. Genshlea, basso, solo quartet. Chorus: Mrs. J.N. Wilson, Mrs. George E. Lester, Miss Florence White, Miss Agnes Ryan, sopranos; Mrs. J.G. Genshlea, Mrs. Walter Longbotham, Mrs. B.F. Howard, Mrs. J. W. James, Miss Myrtle Scroggs, Miss E. Von Hatton, altos; George E. Lester, Dr. J.W. James, Joseph G. Kennedy, C. M. Phinney and J.G. Genshlea.

At the conclusion of the sacred liturgy, Father Wyman ascended the pulpit to deliver a brief but impressive discourse on the life of his dear friend. With great feeling, he applied the text from which he spoke, the message of St. Paul to Timothy, on the life and work of the late Monsignor. Father Wyman spoke feelingly of Monsignor Capel's fondness for children and of the time he gave to the little ones. He had considered the children as great a subject for study as subjects involving more developed things. In conclusion, Father Wyman said that those among the children he had instructed, those whom he had helped, would hold his memory in benediction.

The Rt. Rev. Bishop gave the last absolution of the body and the imposing ceremonies at the church were ended.

### **The Cortege**

At 12:10 p.m. the casket was removed from the church to the hearse in waiting. Six priests of the Diocese of Sacramento served as pall-bearers as far as the hearse and deposited the casket within the receptacle. They were Father Horgan of Placerville, Father Gleason, Jackson, Father Gualco, Chico, Father Coleman of Marysville, Father Sasia, San Jose, and Fathers Ryan and Ellis, Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament and Father Godfrey, OFM. They formed on either side of the hearse and drew up in the middle of the block between K and L on Eleventh Street. The honorary pallbearers who walked beside the hearse from the Cathedral to the cemetery were fourth degree members of the Knights of Columbus. They were Dr. F.E. Shaw, Frank J. O'Brien, William Douglas, E.P. Byrne, F.S. Michel, Jr, E.T. Ryan, Anthony McNamara, E.G. Messner; A.J. Irving, J.C. Hobrect and J.A. Blair. Following behind the pall bearers were representatives of the Catholic societies. An immense concourse of people, including the children of the schools, followed the remains to their resting place in St. Joseph Cemetery, where interment took place in the plot occupied by the dust of the clergy of the diocese.





Photo from the Catholic Herald 1912

### **Priests Carry the Casket of Monsignor Capel to a Horse-drawn Hearse**

At the grave the Rt. Rev. Bishop officiated at the final services over the mortal remains of the beloved prelate.

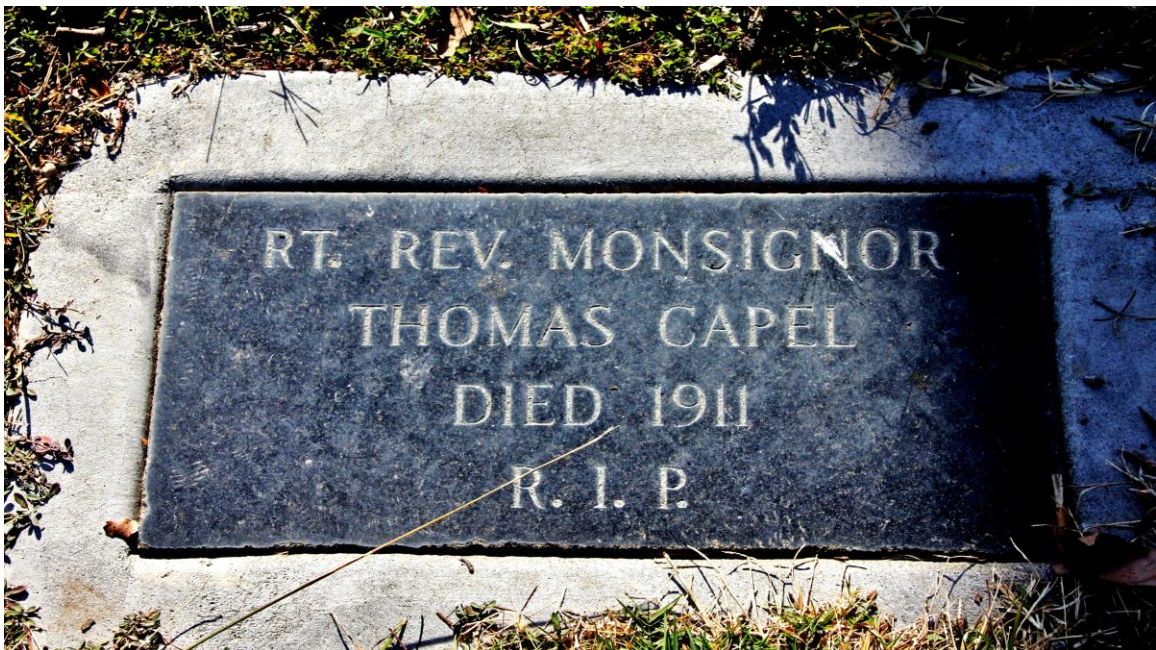


Photo by John E Boll 2013

### **Monsignor Capel's Headstone, St Joseph Cemetery, Sacramento**

### **Sister Apprised of Death**

A devoted friend of Monsignor Capel cabled his sister, Mother Mary Gabriel, in London, concerning the death of her brother. An answer was promptly received from Mother Mary which said, "Grateful thanks for sympathy."

We clip from *The Bee* the following biographical outline, contributed by Mr. C. K. McClatchy, who for twenty years, was numbered among the closest friends of Monsignor Capel, and perhaps was more familiar than anybody else in California with the details of his career since and before his advent in the state.

### **Ordained by Cardinal Wiseman**

The Right Rev. Monsignor Thomas John Capel, D.D., was born October 28, 1836. He was ordained a priest by Cardinal Wiseman of England in the autumn of 1861.

In January 1864, he became cofounder and vice principal of St Mary's Normal College at Hammersmith. Shortly after ordination he was obliged to go to a southern climate to recruit his strength. When there, at Pau, he established the English Catholic Mission and was formally appointed its chaplain.

Subsequently, his health having improved, he returned to London, where his sermons and doctrinal lectures in various churches, and most especially in the Pro-Cathedral at Kensington, soon raised him to the foremost rank among English preachers.

During several visits to Rome he also delivered courses of English sermons in that city by the express command of the Sovereign Pontiff.

### **Appointed Papal Chamberlain by Pope Pius IX**

Monsignor Capel, while laboring at Pau in the work of "conversions," was named Private Chamberlain to Pope Pius IX. In 1868, and after his return to England, Domestic Prelate in 1872.

With returning health, Monsignor Capel once more took to his work of predilection—education—and in February, 1873, established the Catholic Public Schools at Kensington.

He was appointed rector of the College of Higher Studies at Kensington, the nucleus of the Catholic English University in 1874, by the unanimous voice of the Roman Catholic Bishops, and held that appointment until 1878.

### **Replies to Gladstone**

It is said that he intended to avoid publishing until he was 40 years of age, but the attack made on the civil allegiance of Catholics led him, as a born Catholic, to write "A Reply to the Right Hon. W.E. Gladstone's Political Expostulation," 1874. A passage in this work gave rise to an animated controversy between Monsignor Capel and Canon Liddon in



the columns of the Times, respecting the alleged dissemination of several distinctive Roman Catholic doctrines by the ritualistic clergy in the Anglican Church.

Monsignor Capel became so famous throughout the English-speaking world because of the converts he had brought into the Catholic Church, especially those from the nobility of England, where he particularly proselyted that he was immortalized in fiction as the Monsignor Catesby of Disraeli's novel "Lothair."

Monsignor Capel was ordered, after his magnificent work in proselyting, by Cardinal Manning to establish a school for the education of the sons of the British nobility who had been converted to the Catholic faith. The Monsignor objected, saying his forte was preaching and not teaching; that he was no business man and that he believed the experiment would prove a failure in his hands. Cardinal Manning ordered him to proceed with the work. The Monsignor did, putting into the general fund all his own private fortune.

### **Result as Anticipated**

The result was as he had anticipated. The Cardinal rebuked the Monsignor for failure which the Monsignor thought was not his fault; for a failure against which he had advised the Cardinal. The Monsignor replied, and one reply brought on another. The result was that the Monsignor came to America, lecturing to crowded audiences in various Eastern cities, then coming to California where for the last quarter of a century he has lived near Arno, lecturing occasionally and preaching in the Cathedral.

### **Was Beloved of All**

In death of Monsignor Thomas J. Capel, Sacramento has sustained a loss that will be felt by all who have come in contact with his lovable personality or under the influence of his noble character.

The Monsignor was beloved of all who knew him or from time to time availed themselves of the privileges of hearing him in the pulpit. His passing will be mourned by the church to which he rendered such distinguished service as the departure of a great intellectual and spiritual leader, but here where he was known so intimately it is a deeper grief that grips the heart. For the nonce creed does not count. Catholic and Protestant alike know that a sincere friend of all humanity has been called to his reward.

The mere presence of the Monsignor was an inspiration. The profound attainments of his intellectuality were matched by the beautiful simplicity of his life. He lived to a purpose—a great purpose that transcended even his devotion to the church in which he served.

It is given to few men to achieve eminence in the teaching of either Catholicism or Protestantism and yet be able to overcome all the differences of creed by drawing to themselves a universal affection. Monsignor Capel was one of the few. His heart was



always open and his mind considerate. He began a brilliant life's work in England and closed it here in Sacramento, and it was a life in which every day was devoted to the betterment of humanity.

The state, the nation, two nations may grieve now that death has summoned him, but the most poignant sorrow, is that of Sacramento, where he was known and loved as a man rather than a priest. – The Sacramento Bee.

### **Bishop Grace's Tribute to Monsignor Capel**

In the death of Monsignor Capel everyone in Sacramento loses a friend, for he was beloved not only by those of his own church but by all others.

The sweetness of his disposition made him a universal favorite, and his kindness—reached multitudes who did not know him at all. His life-aim was to do good, and realizing the power of religion to that end, his splendid mental qualities were devoted to the spread of the gospel.

No champion the church has had for a long time succeeded so well in furthering his claims.

The Monsignor was a courtly man, and yet seemed unconscious of it, for he never made anyone feel the superiority of his personality. All—rich and poor, old and young—felt at home in his company and regretted to leave it. He was naturally the central figure in any assembly and maintained his dignity with ease.

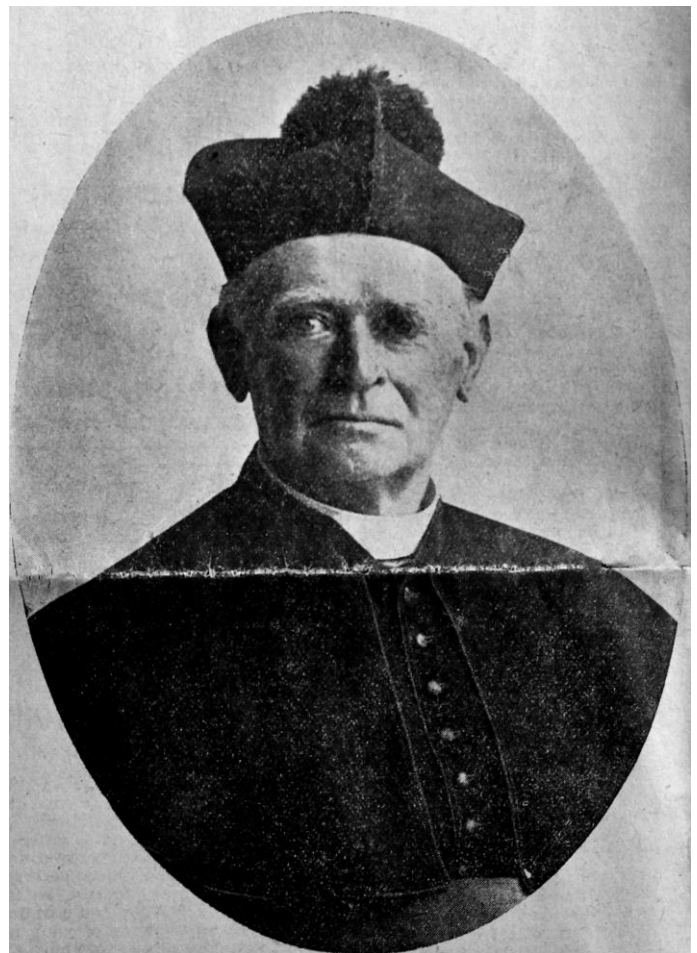
Always busy, he neglected the rest which he needed, and to that fact may be attributed to his sudden death, for he overworked himself.

The end was such as might be expected, for he died without any of the world's goods, rich only in his noble deeds of unselfishness and charity, and his memory is an inspiration to the whole world.

Thus he verified in himself the dying words of his great friend, Cardinal Manning: "I died without money and without debts."



**Right Reverend Monsignor  
Thomas J Capel**



**Photo of Monsignor Capel from the  
Catholic Herald in 1912**