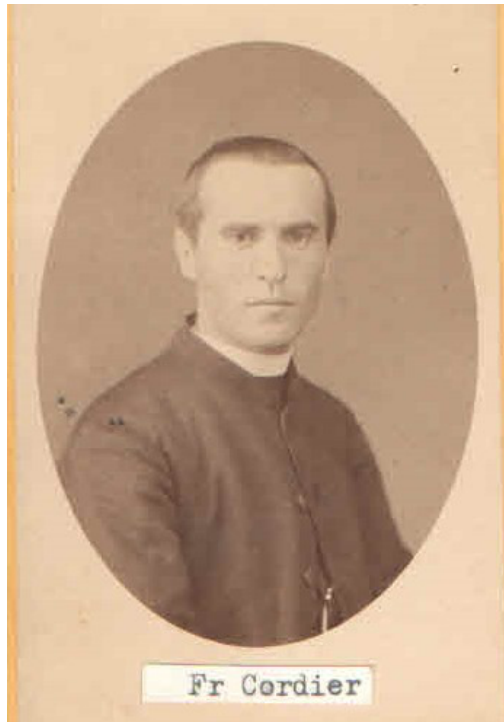


29 November

## Fr JOSEPH HIPPOLITUS CORDIER

22 July 1853 - 29 November 1910



We know that Cordier was born at L'Isle sur le Doubs (France), that he entered the Society in 1873 and died in Damascus in 1910, and that he spent four years in South Africa (1882-86). But that is all we know – or that the archives reveal.

Yet for his four years in Grahamstown we have much detail as we have a succession of letters which he wrote beginning with his sea voyage and arrival in Algoa Bay, his warm reception from the bishop and his happiness serving the local African people in what became the parish of St Mary's. He followed the usual missionary route: first a school, then a chapel and finally a house to live in. He makes candid observations, for example, the girls were much more reluctant to learn the catechism

than boys. They held back. Based at St Aidan's to begin with, he hopes to live in the township and eventually succeeds. He describes his day in detail from early morning: the noisy school where the older ones teach the younger, the times for prayer and recreation, his own lunch which was brought him from a local hotel. He mentions his feelings about the St Aidan's boys whose only ambition was to 'command troops of Kaffirs, to hunt and shoot.' He displays his animosity towards the Protestants, a sentiment common at the time on both sides.

He has high hopes for the Dunbrody scholasticate and feels the church is on the cusp of great things in South Africa. He describes a search in the bush for a missing scholastic who had gone out hunting and got lost. He also, more poignantly, describes accompanying a condemned man to the gallows (which were not working properly. It took four attempts to hang the man). He had spoken to the man and found him disposed for baptism. A European had asked the man to guide him to a certain place and then refused to pay him what was agreed. So the man killed him. Cordier writes of people thinking he will not succeed. Seemingly what he was doing was very strange at the time. But he is full of hope and visits the people in their homes and spends time with them. 'Maybe I am the first European to come near them?' Then suddenly silence. He leaves in 1886 and dies in Damascus in 1910.