

4 February

Fr JAMES BRENNAN

18 September 1900 – 4 February 1973



Jim Brennan was born in Bandon, Co Cork, Ireland, educated at the Jesuit college in Clongowes, not long after James Joyce, and joined the Irish province in 1919. He did philosophy at St May's Hall in England and Cuthbert Donnelly remembers his 'easy friendliness and attractive Irish intonation. With his engaging shyness and dreamy charm he was very popular'. Studies were a duty to be endured but a 'fishing line was a life line.' He loved to fish in the nearby River Hodder and describe many a 'long and mighty struggle in landing a fighting salmon'.

One of his fellow scholastics was Philip Biesly who spoke to him of the Zambezi Mission of which he, Biesly, would later be superior. Jim was soon hooked himself and volunteered for that mission. After regency at Clongowes and theology at Miltown Park, Dublin, he left for S Rhodesia where he started at St Peter's Mbare.

In 1939, he was superior at Monte Cassino and Mike Hannan later wrote of his 'unique understanding and influence over Shona teenagers and young women. It was a genuine charism ... He had a patient, humorous, teasing and wonderfully sympathetic way of handling the problems of countless young people.'

'When Fr Ludgar Böckenhoff came to Monte Cassino as a nervous wreck', Hannan continues, 'slowly and gently Jim brought him back on an even keel.' Böckenhoff went on to be the founder of Loretto and Wedza (Hwedza) Missions.

Besides Monte Cassino, Jim served at Musami, Kwekwe, Campion House, Braeside and finally St John's. Once, at an out station of Musami, he woke in the middle of the night to find a snake had fallen from the ceiling across his face. He was so agitated, he went to the headman and said he was leaving there and then. When he got back to the mission and unwrapped his blanket, he found the snake inside.

Another time, he was with his dog, Pip, and approaching a gap in a hedge where a pole had been attached to two posts - one either side - and so bridging the gap. Pip wouldn't let him through. Confused, Jim looked more closely to see a huge deadly snake lying along the pole.