

22 March

Fr JOHN KELLY

16 June 1902 – 22 March 1955



John Kelly was born into a devout Catholic family in Edinburgh, all of whom were daily Mass goers. He did his schooling at St Aloysius, Glasgow, and worked for a short while in Inland Revenue. In 1919, he joined the novitiate and was ordained in 1933. In 1935, he was studying Shona at Emerald Hill and in 1937 joined the still growing Makumbe Mission.

During the war years, when fuel was scarce, he used to go from out school to out school walking, with his supplies carried by two donkeys.

In 1947, he became superior of the seminary and he taught Latin and Moral Theology. He found the later irksome but he was immediately liked by all who came in contact with him. There was something ‘simple and natural’ about him that attracted people. He was not clever and it took him three days a month to do the accounts but he was conscientious.

He was a shy person and ‘found it difficult to take his community in to his confidence’. He was demanding but everyone respected him and seminarians remembered his sayings years later, like ‘Leave no job unfinished’. David Munyamana recalled his hammering, ‘Be people of integrity’. He was even given the nick name ‘Integer’.

Seminarians felt at home with him and could come and express their frustrations and disappointments to him. He would listen calmly and after a while, send them on their way with words of consolation and encouragement.

But he had TB and it gradually took hold of him. He retired to the House of Adoration, then in Borrowdale, where he could spend much time in prayer.