



Fr Patrick J Walsh, S.J.
(1911-1975. In Zambia 1946-1973)

2 May 1975

In 1926 and 1927, a team of three boys from Mungret College at Feis Luimnighe (Limerick Festival) swept away first prizes for Irish conversation and debate. The three boys were native Irish speakers. They were Seamus Thornton from Spiddal who became a Jesuit in California and later suffered imprisonment at the hands of the Chinese communists; Tadhg Manning who became Archbishop of Los Angeles; and Paddy Walsh from Rosmuc who joined the Irish Province Jesuits in 1928.

Fr Paddy was born in the heart of Connemara, an Irish speaking part of Ireland and grew up in that Irish traditional way of life, a nationalist, whose house often welcomed Padraic Pearse, the Irish nationalist who gave his life in the final struggle for Irish independence.

For regency, he went to Hong Kong, China, but a spot on his lung sent him to Australia where he recovered in the good climate of the Blue Mountains. Back in Ireland for theology and ordination in 1943, he once again volunteered for the missions, this time to Northern Rhodesia where he came in 1946.

His first assignment was Kabwe as superior and education secretary. Chikuni saw him for two years, 1950 and 1951, and then he went north to Kabwata, Lusaka as parish priest where he constructed its first church. From 1958 to 1969 he was parish priest at Kabwata, secretary to Archbishop Adam, chaplain to the African hospital and part-time secretary to the Papal Nuncio. He became involved in the problems of race relations, an obvious source of prejudice, and he had a hand in setting up an inter-racial club in Lusaka where the rising generation of Africans and Whites could meet on an equal footing. His own nationalist background led him to participate in their struggle which he embraced with enthusiasm. When many of the leaders were arrested and sent to prison, Fr Paddy was a constant source of strength and encouragement especially for their bereft families. He administered funds for their support which in large part came from the Labour Party in England. He was a friend of Kenneth Kaunda and looked after his family and drove his wife to Salisbury to visit Kaunda in prison. Within six weeks of Independence, Fr Paddy had his Zambian citizenship and at the first annual awards and decorations, the new President Kaunda conferred on him Officer of the Companion Order of Freedom.

In 1969 Fr Paddy had a heart attack and it was decided that he return to Ireland. As a mark of respect and appreciation, the President and some of the ministers carried the stretcher onto the plane.

Fr Paddy recovered somewhat and returned to Roma parish in 1970 but his health did not improve and it was felt that a lower altitude might improve things, so he went back to Ireland and Gibraltar to work there. The Papal Nuncio in South Africa, Archbishop Polodrinini who had been in Lusaka, invited Fr Paddy to be his secretary in Pretoria. He accepted the offer in 1973. On 2 May 1975 Fr Paddy died in Pretoria of a heart attack and was buried there, a far cry from Rosmuc.

Fr Paddy was completely dedicated to whatever he did, especially in the African hospital where he administered and he bitterly complained to the colonial powers about the conditions there. He had a great sense of loyalty to people, to a cause, to the Lusaka mission, to the Archbishop himself and to the welfare of the Zambian people and the country.

At the funeral Mass in Lusaka, attended by President Kaunda and his wife, the Secretary General, the Prime Minister, some Cabinet Ministers, Kaunda spoke movingly of his friend Fr Paddy. He said that he had had a long letter from Fr Paddy saying 'he was disappointed with me, the Party, Government and people of Zambia because we were allowing classes to spring up within our society. Please, Fr Walsh, trust me as you know me, I will not allow the rich to grow richer and the strong to grow stronger'.

Archbishop Adam wrote about Fr Paddy who had worked as his secretary for eleven years: 'It was not very easy to know and to understand Fr Walsh well. Only gradually I think I succeeded – sometimes in quite a painful way. But the more I knew him the greater was my affection for him, and the respect for his character and qualities. Apart from his total dedication, I admired his total disregard for himself, his feeling for the underprivileged and his deep feeling for justice'.