



Fr Patrick Benson S.J.
(1923-1970. In Zambia 1958-1970).

15 May 1970

The suddenness of Fr Paddy's death came as a great shock. He had left Chikuni for a well-deserved leave in January 1970 and during the course of that leave went to the USA to do some career guidance. He had been doing this at Canisius Secondary School with great success and went overseas to get the latest techniques. He was staying at Fordham University when he died, and an extract from a letter from the Rector there, Fr James Hennessey S. J., gave the details of Fr Paddy's death:

"He had been here a month and we were delighted to have him. Rarely has anyone fitted into the community so well. He was always pleasant and his humor was delightful, he went about his business seriously and impressed all who came into contact with him. He was cheerful to the last; several who were with him at dinner last evening remembered that he had been in fine fettle. He must have retired early. This morning a relative, Br Bernard F.M.S., came to call for him. They had planned to spend the day together. It was about 10 a.m. and when Paddy did not answer, he went to his room and found him dead. It looked to me as if he had tried to get up, then had fallen back and died quickly and peacefully. There was no evidence of struggle or pain. Fr Minister anointed him and our house doctor pronounced him dead of a coronary".

Paddy was born in Co. Clare, Ireland, on 19th December 1923, an only child. He went to St Flannan's College in Co. Clare and after his final year in school, entered the Society on 7 September 1942, much to the regret of the diocesan clergy who would have liked him for the diocese. He went through the usual training in the Society, doing his regency at Belvedere and Mungret. While at these places he was known for his selflessness and the memory everyone had of Fr Paddy was his willingness to help others in any way he could. He was ordained at Milltown Park on the 31st July 1956, a happy event which was tempered by the fact that neither of his parents lived to see him ordained. After his tertianship he came to Zambia.

After spending some time learning the language, he became Manager of Schools for a year, then did two years at Charles Lwanga Teacher Training College and finally came to Canisius in 1962, as Senior Prefect, a position he held until 1969 when he was acting principal for almost a year.

If one were to pick out two virtues in Fr Paddy, all would agree that they were his ever-cheerfulness and readiness to help others. He was a man who rarely thought of himself or his own comfort and this combined with a simplicity of soul, endeared him to all who had dealings with him. In all the houses he had been in, he left his mark, for he was gifted with his hands and electricity had always been his chief hobby. In Milltown Park, Dublin he did the wiring for the telephone system while he was studying there. In many houses in Zambia, both in the Society and elsewhere, there are "many things electrical" which are working due to Fr Paddy's dexterity.

He was never too busy to help others and was ready to drop all to be of assistance to many who called on him to do 'little jobs', to fill in for a supply if someone was sick or unavailable, or just to be cheerful in conversation. This willingness to help others and his fondness for the steering wheel, gave him a certain mobility and it was not uncommon to see him disappearing in clouds of dust down the Chikuni avenue.

He led a tiring life but even so, at the end of a hard week put in at the school work, he would go off on Mass supply to preach and baptize or help in the parish at Chikuni. To one

who lived and worked with Fr Paddy for many years, the oft quoted Latin tag "*consummatus in brevi, explevit tempora multa*" (he accomplished much in a short time) takes on a new meaning.

Though he died in New York, his body was returned to Ireland to be buried at Mungret where he had taught and not too far from his own home.

Many letters of sympathy came to Fr O'Riordan, Education Secretary General, not least from the Minister of Education and his Permanent Secretary. Here are some extracts: "Fr Benson will always be remembered for his warm humanity, keen sense of humor and willingness to assist others." (Minister of Education); "Fr Benson's calm and reasoned approach to education problems, his sense of humor and the cooperative and helpful spirit with which he went about his affairs, remain in the memory." (Permanent Secretary, Min. Ed.).