



Br Davy Byrne, S.J.

(1935-2013. In Zambia 1967-1969)

14 August 2013

Davy Byrne was born in Dublin on 15 January 1935. His mother died seven weeks later. One of many things he came to appreciate about his adoptive family was that he was sent to a Protestant school for his early education, despite the protestations of his local parish priest.

He was employed from fourteen years of age until he joined the Jesuits in 1957, and during that time he developed an enthusiasm for long-distance cycling. He took part in many team races and had one serious fall.

After the noviceship he worked mainly in the Milltown Park refectory for seven years. From 1967-1969 he was in charge of staff at St. Ignatius in Lusaka, Zambia. There he experienced the alienation of the manual worker in relation to established Jesuits. He was, nevertheless, convinced of the role of the brother's vocation in the church. It really mattered to him that he was a Jesuit brother. He never had any desire to be a priest. He knew that he could do things as a brother that priests cannot do. His friends among the Irish Jesuit brothers contributed wonderful music and prayers to his requiem.

After tertianship he stayed with a religious community in London while taking courses in sociology at Barking Polytechnic. Following this, he worked from 1972 to 1985 in the Social Service Centre, Gardiner Street, where he developed a lifelong friendship with his colleague Sister Emmanuel. There he looked after people on the streets who needed food, a wash and a shave. He had great stories about the characters he met. He cared for them, and could understand where they came from.

He had a great love of God and of prayer. He used to talk of Holy Cross, the Benedictine monastery in Rostrevor, as his second spiritual home, especially in later years when his health failed. For many years he attended meetings of the European Jesuit Workers' Group. These were Jesuits who worked alongside people in difficult situations in factories and tried to find Christ in their situation. It was important to Davy that these Jesuits came from many different European countries: he knew the Society is an international body.

In 1985, as a fifty-year old true Dub, he took the courageous step of joining the new venture at Iona, Portadown, in the middle of The Troubles. Portadown was to become his home, where he wanted always to be, and he was the first ever Jesuit to be buried in Northern Ireland. There was a Jesuit house in Donard, County Down, in the 19th century with some Jesuit graves, but that was before the creation of Northern Ireland.

The Jesuit work in Churchill Park began with community development, and Davy was part of the setting up of the Drumcree Community Centre. People from there attended

his funeral. He developed a more personal mission to people in stress, which was expressed in the Gingerbread group. Many people give testimony to Davy's presence and word of healing wisdom. He said that his real work was being present to people. When he was present and listening to them, God was present.

He made close friends among Protestants, especially in the Corcrain area which is across the peace wall from Garvaghy Road. It was very important to him that that some of his closest friends were Protestants. Building relationships in Portadown between Catholics and Protestant was very important to him. He hated bigotry and sectarianism.

He would have loved his own funeral – the uniformed band preceding the hearse, the hosts of neighbors and friends – a sense of a life fulfilled. A fellow Jesuit said it was the happiest funeral he ever attended.