



Fr Maurice Dowling S.J.
(1896-1965. In Zambia 1947-1965)

26 August 1965

Maurice's family used to spend a month in Skerries, an Irish seaside resort, in the summer. Maurice Dowling was a keen, strong swimmer and one morning, as a teenager, he saved the life of a girl who was drowning. He went home to lunch and never mentioned the incident. It was when the family had finished tea and Mr Dowling was reading the evening newspaper that he came across a paragraph or two describing the plucky rescue by his son. Passing no comment, he scribbled "Bravo!" beside the passage and silently handed the paper to his son. This incident in some way, sums up a characteristic of Maurice that he had already developed at that age, - he was modest in his achievements and helpful to others.

He was born in 1896 in Dublin. His father was the Registrar of the College of Science in Dublin. His mother died early, leaving Maurice and his brother Desmond behind. Both boys went to Clongowes Wood College for their secondary education.

At the age of 18, Maurice entered the Jesuits at Tullabeg and followed the normal course of studies which were followed by Irish Jesuits of the time. He was ordained in 1929 on 29th August. He spent some time in the colleges as teacher and prefect e.g. the Crescent, Limerick in the thirties.

As a young Jesuit, he learned to speak Irish, spending many a holiday in the Gaeltacht (Irish speaking area). He genuinely loved the language and when home on what was to be his last leave, he was delighted to hear that there were in existence Irish-speaking praesidia of the Legion of Mary. He had a great admiration for Edel Quinn who died working for the Legion in Africa.

During the Second World War he volunteered as a chaplain. Just before departing, he was involved in an accident where he was thrown through the window of the bus in which he was traveling. As he lay on the ground in his own blood, he heard one of the rescuers say to another, nodding towards Maurice, "He's had it"! (but in much more colorful language).

After the war, when the Jesuits in Northern Rhodesia were looking for men, two Irish Jesuits volunteered in 1946 (Fr Paddy Walsh and Fr Paddy O'Brien) to be followed by two more in 1947, Maurice and Fr Joe Gill. They came to Chikuni.

The Bishops had been endeavoring to set up a Catholic Secondary school for Africans. There was only one secondary school for Africans in the whole country, a Government school at Munali, Lusaka which had been founded in 1938. In 1949 Canisius Secondary School opened its doors to the first class. Speaking of Maurice's work in the college during the first few years, Fr Max Prokoph who had been instrumental in getting Fr Dowling for the mission and who had been his principal, said of him, "I have never met a more loyal man". Fr Prokoph described how in the initial difficult days, Maurice had stood by him on every occasion, always ready to help, never questioning a decision, absolutely loyal.

While at Chikuni, he would travel south to Choma and even to Kalomo at the weekend to say Mass long before a mission was opened. Then back to the school for another week of teaching. In 1962 he went to Namwala to the newly built mission as the first resident priest, bringing with him some Sisters of Charity. He later moved to Chivuna in 1964 and died in Lusaka on 26 August 1965 of a heart attack

Fr Maurice had great qualities: his deep spirituality and union with God, his great zeal for souls, his kindness and courtesy to all, his optimistic outlook even when things looked dark. He had a zest for life, his cheerfulness was contagious. Loyalty would seem to have been the source of his strength: loyalty to God as a priest and religious; loyalty to his country as shown by his deep love of it; loyalty to the Society as shown by his great respect for it and his dislike of even the slightest criticism of it; loyalty to his Alma Mater and to his many friends as shown by his great interest in all that concerned them. His life had been a full one, in the classroom, in the army and on the mission.