



Fr Edward Diffely, S.J.
(1916-1993. In Zambia 1966-1968)

22 September 1993

Eddie was born in Cloonfad, Co Roscommon in 1916. His family moved to Galway where Eddie attended St Joseph's College and later Colaiste Iognaid. He entered the Jesuits in 1934 and was ordained priest at Milltown Park, Dublin, in 1947.

He spent almost fifty years in the active apostolate, first of all as a scholastic in Clongowes and as a priest in Colaiste Iognaid and Belvedere; secondly in giving retreats and missions throughout Ireland; and lastly in mission work in Zambia. To all of these, he brought unbounded drive and enthusiasm.

Eddie was a conscientious and successful teacher, mostly of Irish and Religion. He had a tremendous capacity for motivating young people and drawing the best out of them. They followed his lead with enthusiasm and zest. Many of them remember him years later with gratitude and affection.

It was probably outside the classroom that Eddie exercised his greatest talent. He was strong and athletic with considerable natural talent for a variety of games. In each of the colleges in which he taught, his love for the Irish language and Irish culture was carried over from the classroom into a wide range of extra-curricular activities: Irish dancing, debating, hurling and Gaelic football. His interest in these continued through life. His great interest, however, was in rowing. As a schoolboy, he with a few others, organized the first rowing crew to appear on the river for many years. This was in the early thirties and ever since the college rowing club has played a large part in the history of Galway rowing. One of the highlights of his life was his selection as President of the Irish Rowing Union.

He had a natural gift for friendship. Wherever he went, he made friends. A casual meeting would lead to further contacts, growing eventually into a close friendship which often lasted for life. His warmth and humanity and genuine interest in people broke through all barriers of nationality, color, religious belief or social caste.

He loved company and social occasions, and he enlivened every one of these. But it was not all fun. Many a time at one of these functions he would be called out by someone who had been away from the Church for many a year.

He was very faithful to the way of life he had undertaken. Number one in Eddie Diffely's book was his priesthood and Jesuit vocation. No one was ever under any illusion about his commitment to these. His faithfulness to the Mass and the breviary was absolute. He never omitted these no matter how crowded his day was.

What were his failings? It can be said that he had quite a few, most of them springing from a generous nature that was quick to react to any form of injustice. Cheek from a pupil in class or a motorist parking and blocking an entrance could produce a fit of rage and he would tear strips of the offender with typical Diffely eloquence.

His short two years in Zambia brought the same characteristics of this generous man with his gift for friendship and conviviality. He was a teacher in Mukasa, minister in St Ignatius and he gave retreats. Generosity and a desire to help deserving causes were always part of Eddie's apostolate. He took an active part in fund-raising to found a

Cheshire Home for disabled people in Galway as well as other charities which benefited from his efforts – Simon, Samaritans and St Vincent de Paul Society.

He had a long spell of illness at the end of 1992 which left him weak and apparently beyond recovery. But he rallied and regained some strength. He was due to leave for England to visit relations in September and was looking forward to the holiday. But the Lord had different plans for him and took him to Himself the evening before he left. Thus he was active and generous to the end. The news of his sudden death came as a great shock to his family and to many people in Galway. Yet all were agreed that this is how he himself would have chosen to pass away among his own while still active and in touch with many people, with a minimum of fuss.