



**Fr Maurice Leahy S.J.**  
**(1920-2004. In Zambia 1972-2004)**

**26 October 2004**

To look at the rather frail figure of Fr Maurice, one would not imagine that he was a fine rugby player during his school days at the Crescent, Limerick. In a way, Maurice was a Limerick man through and through. He was born there on 22 July 1920, grew up there and went to school there. He was a bright student, coming top of his class year by year and winning many prizes. He was a good sportsman and athlete, playing on the school junior and senior rugby teams. With those long thin legs of his he was, not surprisingly, the Boys' High Jump Champion of Limerick.

He joined the Society in 1937 at Emo Park, took Latin and History at University, studied philosophy at Tullabeg and went back to Limerick for regency to his old school. After ordination at Milltown Park, Dublin, in 1952, he spent six years at Gonzaga College in Dublin teaching and being minister. From 1960 to 1972 he was back in Limerick, first in the Crescent College teaching and then for five years at Mungret College, again teaching and vice-superior at the Apostolic School. His qualities of simplicity and outstanding patience and kindness must have made teaching rather a trial.

1966 seems to have been a turning point in his life as regards work. He moved to the Sacred Heart Church in Limerick as a pastoral worker for six years, functioning quietly and successfully. In 1972 another big change took place in his life, this time he was missioned to Zambia at the age of 52, where he spent the rest of his life at pastoral work. After his ordination he had asked to be sent to the missions (Hong Kong) and twenty years later his wish was answered (Zambia).

To begin with, he studied chiTonga at Chikuni and then moved to Namwala (1973) as parish priest and superior there. After nine years there he was transferred to Assumption Parish in Mazabuka for a year before moving to the Sugar Estate at Nakambala, where he worked for eleven years, ten years of these as superior and eight years as parish priest.

His younger brother Harry singles out his gentleness and simplicity. He was always kindly and thoughtful, never bad-tempered or argumentative. He really was 'the good peaceable man' of Thomas a Kempis. Everyone was good in Maurice's eyes. His brother tells of his happiness in these years in Zambia. He was at home among the villagers in Namwala, the urban dwellers in Mazabuka and Nakambala, as well as the sick and feeble in Chikuni hospital. As one person put it: 'A man of simple and quaint goodness, who had his heart in the right place'.

In 1994, Maurice now 74, moved to Chikuni again, as pastoral worker. He was a very dedicated priest. He was a man of God, deeply spiritual, which people recognized in their own perceptive way. He was an easy person to live with as he was so undemanding even as a superior. He became a charismatic, again in his own quiet way and became a much-sought-after giver of directed retreats.

He developed a peculiar up-down characteristic in his speech; one minute bass and the next falsetto. This affected his preaching in public but it did not interfere with his retreat giving. He was a very methodical man. The data on the outstations where he supplied were kept up to-date so that the priest who took over the outstations, had a

clear picture of each of these outstations and of the people there, who were being prepared for baptism, for marriage and so on.

At the end of 2003, he underwent a colostomy operation in Lusaka, and moved to John Chula House. While there the doctor remarked that Maurice had the recuperative powers of a man of 25! — Maurice was 83 years of age at the time. The doctor suggested that he return to Ireland for the next operation for a number of reasons. This Maurice did on 14 February 2004. The operation was a success. Later, while at Cherryfield Lodge, he suffered a stroke, unrelated to the operation and he died on 26 October 2004 in Dublin but he was buried in his own beloved Limerick.