



Fr Dermot Murphy, S.J.

(1916-1979. In Zambia 1950-1973)

8 December 1979

Dermot Murphy was born in Dublin on 26 May 1916 to William Joseph and Clare (O'Shaughnessy) Murphy. He did his secondary schooling in Rockwell and Belvedere Colleges. He entered the novitiate at Emo in September 1935 and after vows he studied at the University from 1937 to 1939. This was followed by philosophy in Tullabeg (1939-1942). For his regency he worked in Clongowes Wood College from 1962 to 1965 and then went to Milltown Park for theology (1945 to 1949). He was ordained on 28 July 1948.

Just the end of his tertianship Fr Dermot was selected to go to the then Northern Rhodesia and was one of the nine Irish Jesuits who went there in 1950. The Irish Province had been asked by Fr General to send men to aid their Polish colleagues there. When they arrived, Fr Dermot was based mainly at Fumbo and Chikuni during his first five years. Many were the stories told about his apostolic adventures in the Gweembe Valley and along the line of rail during these years. His resourcefulness in coming up with needed articles was also a byword. He seemed to have a ready supply of things required by his brethren. One Father, setting out on a visit to a distant outpost in very hot conditions, wished to take some butter and other perishables. Fr Dermot said to him, "I think I have a refrigerator bag". He produced the bag when most of his companions did not know that such things existed.

The second half of 1956 saw Fr Dermot in Lusaka as Parish Priest of St Ignatius. He immediately launched the building of a long-planned church which involved a great deal of work to find both money and materials. In doing this, with remarkable success, he acquired a host of friends, acquaintances, and some would add, with affectionate facetiousness – victims. On one occasion when a motor dealer offered a donation of ten pounds, Dermot intimated that a larger donation would better match the esteem in which the listener was held. After an exchange of pleasantries, the business man said: "Just to listen to you, Father, is well worth L25; here is my cheque".

The new church was blessed in December 1957 and, over the next few years, Dermot added to it with loving care. He also made improvements to the already existing parish hall and, in particular, promoted youth entertainment.

Returning from leave in 1964, he was assigned to Roma township where the cathedral was to be built. While there, he presided over the building of it as well as the Regiment Church at Chilenje.

In 1972 Dermot's health began to fail and increasing heart trouble made it advisable for him to live at a lower altitude. While he had been a scholastic at Clongowes doing his regency, diphtheria had broken out. All the community were tested and found to be immune. Dermot, however, went down afterwards with a bad bout of diphtheria. This came against him later in life as it can affect the heart. Accordingly, he left Zambia in February 1973 and took up parish work at sea level in Brighton, England, where he labored with his customary zeal and success until his regretted death on 8 December 1979. His brother John, also a Jesuit, was with him when he died. When

John arrived, Dermot was in a coma. John wrote, "He (Dermot) did not give any sign of recognition but I had the uncanny feeling that he knew I was there".

A strict contemporary writing about Dermot said, "Dermot was, and remained so all his life, the kind of person one was glad to meet. It was always good to have him in the company. He had a sense of humor and an original dry verbal wit. After one of his verbal shafts, he would cackle happily. I think he was incapable of an uncharitable remark and he never showed disappointment or bitterness. He was a good community man". Before he left Zambia, Dermot could become depressed, maybe the result of his health. However when in the parish in Brighton he was most apostolic as witnessed by the parishioners there.