



Fr Thomas O'Meara, S.J.
(1911-1993. In Zambia 1955-1983)

30 December 1993

Tommie O'Meara (as he was known) had two brothers also in the Society.

One summer on holidays the local parish priest was invited to dinner and was being introduced to the scholastics, one of whom was Charles O'Conor-Don (a descendant of the last High King of Ireland) was introduced as 'This is the O'Conor-Don', Tommie pipes up 'I'm the O'Meara Tom'.

Tommie was born in Mallow, Co Cork in 1911, did his secondary education in Clongowes Wood College and entered the Society in 1929 at Tullabeg. He also did regency at Clongowes taking his H Dip in Education while there. Then Milltown Park saw him for theology and ordination on 29 July 1943.

After tertianship, he was posted to Milltown Park as minister for 8 years, 1945-1953, a difficult and onerous task catering for four years of theologians, priests, and brothers. He entered the work with a heart and a half, the way he took all the jobs he was given. He moved to Gardiner Street ministering in the church for two years. The pattern was set for the rest of his life, being minister and/or, for the most part, being engaged in pastoral work. He was direct in speech but ever kind and charitable. He had a great laugh and a strong voice (some say a 'loud' voice) which became stronger in later years with the advance of deafness. He was a man of very definite opinions and expressed them so. A bit of an either-or person; sometimes that was bluff, sometimes not. In his directness, simplicity and impulsiveness, he was far from being the stereotype Jesuit. Those 8 years as minister in Milltown Park brought out his gifts of unselfishness and generosity.

He came to Zambia in 1955, went to Chivuna for the language, then to Chikuni as minister and parish work. He went back to Chivuna again as minister and parish priest. Mazabuka had him for 13 years (1962-1975) doing all sorts of jobs: hospital chaplain, minister, bursar, parish work, teaching - he set up an unofficial school to cater for those who did not get into any school, but he had to discontinue it. Tommie was an active priest, on-the-go all the time. His brethren used to joke that he never read a book after theology, there was too much to do. He returned to Chikuni in 1975 as minister and assisted in the parish church.

However, arthritis began to take over in his life and developed quickly despite a hip replacement. It was noticeably in the deformation of his hands. Now came a life of complete inactivity, a great cross for such an active person. He found it hard to come to terms with the arthritis but after a while he did. He returned to Ireland in 1983, to Cherryfield, the Jesuit infirmary in Dublin and was confined to a wheelchair. So difficult to adapt to this new type of life and with deafness increasing, there must have been the inevitable feeling of isolation. The odd breaks for him, apart from visits from relatives and Jesuits from Zambia, was to watch the horses on TV, an ancient love of his.

Fr Eddie Kent did him a great service by supplying him with books of varying interest for him, spiritual, Irish and so forth. Dormant interests were awakened and life surely was made a little more bearable.

His ten long years of suffering and prayer came to an end on 30 December 1993.