



FR. RICHARD McELLIGOTT, R.I.P.

On June 5th, 1980, there was a joyous McElligott reunion in heaven when Richard, the second youngest of fourteen children answered roll-call and the family was at full strength once more. It was the Feast of Corpus Christi, a fitting day for such a man to go to God, because devotion to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament had been one of the key devotions of his long life. He slipped away quietly out of this world while his Salesian Confreres were in the College Chapel for Community Mass.

Richard McElligott was born in Kilflynn, Lixnaw, Co. Kerry, on August 11th, 1889. He was a tall young man of seventeen years when he left Ireland for London in 1906 with the intention of becoming a Salesian priest. After four years of study and Novitiate training,

he made his First Profession in 1910. Three years later he made his Final Profession.

These formative years in the Salesian Way must have been happy years for him, because they left him with a store of pleasant memories that he loved to recall in later life, especially when he met a Salesian of his generation who shared experiences with him, and knew at first hand the characters the reminiscences enshrined.

In the autumn of 1913, Richard found himself on his way to Cape Town to work in the only Salesian Foundation in South Africa at that time. It was the beginning of a long association with that area of Salesian activity, and his name is spoken with reverence and pride by those who laboured

with him in that distant corner of the vineyard.

He was ordained priest in Cape Town in October 1917. From then until 1929, he worked on the staff of the Salesian Institute in various capacities, bringing to each office a distinction born of his characteristic drive for excellence in all he did.

His first appointment as Rector in Warrenstown came in 1929. He finally laid aside the responsibility of Superiorship only in 1966. That represents a long stint of faithful service -- not all of it as Rector, but always in some important position in the Society.

Fr. McElligott was appointed to represent the confreres on several occasions as their delegate at the General Chapter of the Congregation. He proved himself to be a thorough and courageous representative who put the point of view of those who had elected him as their spokesman, nothing deterred that some of the ideas he was putting forward were not too popular in high places.

In the mid-1930's, he was Provincial Economist for one year, followed by a period as Rector of Salesian College, Farnborough. He returned to Warrenstown as Rector for the difficult years of the war.

Though this was anything but an easy time to steer a college through all kind of economic troubles and shortages, he guided that establishment to solvency, and prepared the ground for the big developments that have made Warrenstown the finely-equipped educational centre it is today.

From 1946 - 1952, Fr. McElligott was Rector of Pallaskeenry, and under his guiding hand that College, too, knew considerable expansion, especially in the area of the Secondary School.

In the summer of 1951, Fr. McElligott was the Holy See's representative at the International Congress on Soil Science in Dublin, in which experts from 140 countries took part. As his term of office as Superior came to an end in 1952, Fr. McElligott received from University College, Dublin, an honorary degree as Master of Agriculture, in recognition of his work in experimental research and education in that important sector of Irish life during his terms as Superior in Warrenstown and Pallaskeenry. It was a fitting send-off for this great Son of Don Bosco, for he was soon to be on his way again to take over the onerous task as Superior in Cape Town where he spent so many fruitful years prior to and after his ordination.

The South Africa to which he returned in the 1950's was a changed place from what he had left more than twenty years earlier and to which he looked back with nostalgia and happy expectation. The hot winds of change had blown effectively in the intervening years, and many good friends with whom he had worked as a young priest had gone from the scene. So it was not unwelcome news for him when he was recalled to Dublin in 1956. Here for ten years he guided the destinies of the newly-established University Hostel in Crumlin, making many improvements in that historic residence which, it is said, once housed Oliver Cromwell.

For a short spell, Fr. Mc Elligott worked again in South Africa, this time in the Transvaal, where he was confessor in a large boarding school. The year 1967, however, saw him once again back in Pallaskenry where he was to spend the rest of his days. It all fell out as he would have planned it, for he loved Ireland as his home, and the Irish people as the ones he understood best of all. To the end, he was happy to be engaged in useful work in the Community, ever ready to take his place in the confessional when there was need of his services.

He always showed himself to

be an interested and active churchman, a man somewhat conservative and wary of change, a staunch supporter of the Pope in all circumstances. The revised liturgy came too late in his career for him to be actively involved in it or even to espouse it with any ardent enthusiasm.

He was always a perfectionist, satisfied with nothing short of the most dedicated efforts of all who worked on his team. Because of his one hundred per cent commitment to the work in hand, he could be a demanding taskmaster, though always generous in his praise for those who shared the work with him if they had done what they could to ensure its happy outcome.

He was what one might call a late survivor from a former civilisation, a man of genteel courtesy and gracious manners, with a native Kerry appreciation of the telling phrase even in casual conversation. On more formal occasions, he could rise to great flights of oratory, making careful progress through the well-ordered sequence of his address, with colourful and well-chosen phrases to press his points home. When the cause had to be pleaded in writing, he prepared his manuscript with painstaking care, returning time and again to his word-lathe, and he would not be

satisfied till he came up with the elegantly-turned word or phrase that signified exactly the fine distinction he wanted to convey.

Though Richard McElligott was a man of outsize physical stature, and a man who loved the outdoor life, he had to contend for years with a somewhat delicate constitution. Much as he disliked the restraining elements of life in hospital, he had paid many visits to such institutions, the last one being in January of this year when he underwent minor surgery in Limerick. This did not bring the success the doctors had hoped it would, and the months preceding his death brought a steady decline in his condition.

Yet during those last months he continued to say Mass in his room and frequently had another confrere to concelebrate with him. In the weeks preceding his death, when he felt himself growing weaker and no longer able to say Mass, the centre of his prayerful day was when a priest said Mass for him in his room and gave him Holy Communion.

On a soft June day we laid him to rest in the College cemetery in Pallaskenry. It was a spot he would have chosen for his long sleep, in a plot he had selected and laid

out many years before as a fitting place for Salesians to lie when their course was run.

As we stood by the open grave, his friends bidding him a last farewell in the haunting plainchant melodies, the words of a panegyric spoken nearly one hundred years ago came to mind. They were uttered by Dr. Edward O'Dwyer of Limerick as a final tribute to Lord Emly at Ballybrown in April 1894. The terms of high praise could well be applied to Fr. McElligott in 1980:

"There was about him a wonderful charm, there was a grace and courtesy as if of the olden times, there was an overflowing of the heart, there was a deep and profound faith. And did he not stand head and shoulders every way over them all in mental calibre, in the solidity of his character, in the solidity of his judgement -- in everything that makes a man strong and influential? He is gone, and I know no man who can take his place."

May the Irish earth rest lightly on him, and may his soul be at peace with God. As you continue to pray for his soul, pray also for the needs of the Irish Province, and for,

Yours devotedly in J.C.,

Val Collier, S.D.B. Rector.