

Looking Back:

A Layman's Tribute To A Zealous Priest

BY THOMAS H. O'CONNOR

Monsignor Wilfred Crough, an intimate friend of Father Leo C. Mooney for more than four decades, told of the late Father Mooney's wide activities as a priest at the Solemn Pontifical Funeral Mass Monday of last week. The distinguished head of St. Bernard's Seminary gave a follow-priest's recollection.

Here, a layman recalls his intimate association with the late pastor of St. Patrick's Church from shortly after ordination up until illness stopped the zealous efforts of a dedicated priest.

Shortly after Bishop Thomas F. Hickey in 1926 named Father Mooney diocesan director of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, he was contacted by this writer, then manager of the Rochester Echo, Catholic newspaper published in Buffalo. Father Mooney with the cooperation of William T. Nolan, Catholic Charities executive secretary, Mr. Nolan trusted this week, had set up a small office in Lincoln-Rochester Trust Co. office building. I sought to help publicize the mission program and at the same time gain prestige for the paper. Catholic newspapers were restricted in appeal in those days.

Evidence of Father Mooney's alertness to the program in which he was engaged was his moving to a larger and better appointed office in the bank building based on experience of others that people of means would more apt to donate to the missions in an atmosphere in keeping with their affluence.

During this period Father Mooney lent his zeal to missions throughout the world. Two groups we recall that helped greatly were the Maryknoll Fathers of Ossining and the Vincentian Fathers who staff Niagara University and world wide missions.

Never doing things by halves, Father Mooney visited the Maryknoll headquarters on the Hudson, and on one occasion took me along. There the story of the Young American society was heard first hand from one of the founders, later Bishop James A. Walsh and young missionaries back from the field, some later to gain fame, such as Bishop Patrick A. Byrne, from Auburn, subject of "Ambassador in Chains," a book by fellow Maryknoller Bishop Raymond A. Lane and Bishop Peschang.

The Vincentians he worked to assist with prayers and funds were many. Included were two young men who had gone to high school and seminary together and later worked in the China missions, Rev. Frederick A. McGuire, C.M., now heading the mission secretariate in Washington and Rev. Frederick F. Gehring, C.M., later to become famed as Marine Chaplain and as "The Guadalcanal Padre."

During this time Father Mooney who when he first began his activity was too modest to want his name to appear in the paper realized the value to the project on which he was working of public relations. This led him to want to lend his effort to the Catholic Press in the diocese.

Our first Catholic press convention in 1931 was attended in Baltimore with Father Mooney and the late William A. Heindl, prominent local printer. Here Father Mooney in his affable way met leading editors of the country, learned of the problems and came back with an understanding that helped in his later seeking to make the Catholic Journal, the diocesan newspaper.

The hours he spent in helping to bring about a diocesan operated paper were unlimited after Bishop John Francis O'Hern gave him the assignment of becoming managing editor of the paper.

Mr. Heindl helped him with advice from printing experience of many years. They lined up the services of Howard W. Klippert as business manager, this writer as editor and later that of Elmer Grapensteter as circulation manager.

The time of the take-over of the paper in 1932 was one of growing financial anxiety. In the next year my family was visited with sickness, four of the children had scarlet fever and one, our daughter, succumbed in a week. During the trial, Father Mooney stood by us constantly and with Monsignor John M. Duffy saw us through.

Deeply conscious of the efficacy of prayer, Father Mooney was helpful in establishing the Discalced Carmelite Sisters in Rochester and became their first Chaplain. He set up for them a Monastery in the former residence of the Rev. Dr. Clarence Barber, pastor of Lake Ave., Baptist Church. The large dwelling at Saratoga Ave. and Jones Ave. is now the rectory of St. Patrick's Church. Father Mooney arranged that when the Carmelite Sisters moved out the place would still be a place of religion and contain a Tabernacle.

Here we visited often. I remember helping to move the Sisters' effects into their new monastery, being a bearer when one was called to eternal reward attending a reception of the habit. Through this experience I became deeply interested in the Sisters and am sure that their prayers carried the diocesan newspaper through many a trial and my own family benefited greatly during the years.

Father Mooney in the early days of the paper interested priests of the diocese in contributing their talents to the newspaper. His assistant in the Propagation of the Faith, later became his successor in both that society and on the paper, Monsignor John S. Randall, today the paper's head.

I thought of the first such priest enlisted by Father Mooney after the funeral Mass when Monsignor Patrick J. Flynn, pastor of St. Agnes Church, Avon and prior to that for 15 years editor of that paper took me to the parking lot to ride back to the office. In the same parking lot on another occasion I was with Father Eugene B. Hudson, first to write editorials on the reorganized diocesan paper.

Vicar's Wife Edits Diary

London — (RNS) — The Rectory, Chappan Ltd., is Mrs. Dorothy White.

Her husband, the Rev. Kent White, is vicar of the Anglican Guild Church of St. Mary's, Aldermary, one of London's oldest churches.

The translator, assigned by the Catholic book firm of Geo-

Father Mooney

Following is the text of the eulogy given by St. Rev. Monsignor Wilfred T. Crough at the funeral Mass for Rev. Leo C. Mooney at St. Patrick's Church, Rochester, Monday, August 24. Father Mooney died Friday, August 21, 1964.

"I will most gladly spend and be spent myself for your souls" (2 Cor xii 13).

We have gathered here this morning in this humble church he loved so well, to bid a sad and prayerful farewell to a priest of God. As we look upon the mortal remains of a devoted friend, arrayed in the sacred vestments of his priestly office, we wonder again at the ways of Providence in the great mystery of Life and death.

For a few brief moments we call years, we say here in this life—and suddenly, at God's summons, we are taken away from the scene of our activity, our earthly life ends, and we are confronted with the mystery of a land beyond the grave about which only our faith can enlighten us.

But the death and burial of a priest, not only for his priestly friends, but for all who knew him, has an added significance in that it reminds us that a source of spiritual power has been taken from this world where it is always so badly needed. And further, the death of a priest is a forceful reminder of the stupendous blessing which God has given to the world in the Priesthood of Jesus Christ. To appreciate that priest-hood, we need only go back in spirit and let our thoughts rest upon Our Blessed Lord, the Redeemer and Savior of the world.

Throughout the length and breadth of Palestine He traveled, preaching and teaching, encouraging and comforting, healing and sanctifying—all in preparation for His Good Friday, when upon the altar of the Cross He would offer Himself, a divine victim, for the sins of the world, and thereby win for all mankind grace, redemption and the promise and certain hope of eternal happiness.

But Our Lord's work of sanctification and redemption could not end there. It must be continued and be applied to all men of all times. And for that reason He must choose Apostles, and through them and their successors, the Bishops, choose other priests, to carry on that work. He might have chosen angels, but instead He chose poor, weak, human creatures like ourselves.

It was into this glorious priesthood that Father Mooney was taken, and in it he served faithfully, and actively for nearly forty years, until he died in the firmly believed hope of the use of his natural faculties, and what his foresaw with even greater pain—deprived him of the use of his priestly powers.

Reared by staunchly Catholic parents in a home where reigned the Christian atmosphere of peace and unity that is the good ground for vocations, Fr. Mooney early in life heard the call to the altar of God. In his humble disbelief that so great a privilege could be for him, he hesitated momentarily. But the call persisted, and with a merry heart he answered it, pursued it with diligence and prayer, successfully met the requirements of study and discipline—always anxiously looking forward to the day when the priesthood would no longer be a boyhood dream, but a wonderful reality stamped forever upon his soul. That day came on the seventh of June, 1924, when the hands of a Bishop were imposed upon his head, and a few minutes later his priestly hand were anointed and consecrated for the handling of the bread, which by his words and the divine power coursing through them, would be changed into the Body of Him, whom he was to imitate for the rest of his life.

Joy and happiness filled his heart as he set out upon his priestly labor, first in St. Mary's, Auburn, and later in St. Bridget's Church in Rochester, where he was sent to assist an aging pastor sorely in need of the physical and spiritual

the good that was in his power to do.

Again, those of us who knew him well, know that those not in his own powers that he could do, but in the help he obtained through prayer, especially to Our Lady, to whom he was devoted with all the tenderness and confidence of a child appealing to a Mother. It was his own conviction of the value of prayer that prompted him to suggest to Bishop O'Hern the organization in Rochester of a unit of the Nocturnal Adoration Society, now so healthily flourishing in the diocese. And he had his share also in the establishment of that other powerhouse of prayer, the Carmelite Monastery, whose Sisters he served so faithfully and devotedly as their chaplain. To their prayers, too, he recommended with supreme confidence his every undertaking.

In 1939, after the closing of the old Cathedral, Father Mooney was appointed pastor of this St. Patrick's parish. The growing industry, and a moving population had considerably reduced the size of the parish and its resources. But he was equal to the challenge. What had been a drab and dismal situation he successfully transformed into this humble parish church, which he served so well for twenty years. If limited means prevented him from being the richest, he was determined that his church have the best he could provide in its gleaming, spotless altar furnishings in the music he loved to hear, and in service to his people.

Here he labored with his enormous energy, vitality and interest, an interest always marked with a special concern for the poor, the forgotten, for those in any way suffering the misfortune and hardships that come in the battle of life.

His warmhearted sympathies, his Christlike example, made St. Patrick's a kind of refuge for those too timid or ashamed to bring their troubles to others they knew better, but could not approach so readily. Even the derelict was no stranger to Father Mooney, sure as even he might be that, though abandoned by everyone else, he could be sure of a warm welcome and a helping hand at Father Mooney's rectory. And it is hard to believe that his priestly freedom, if ever, was he satisfied to relieve their material needs, but seeing in these people a need of God's grace, he would direct them until he had dispensed them and given them the grace they needed.

And all this, never for his own glory, but "compelled by the charity of Christ" whose words he knew as well, that "as often as you did this to the least of my brethren, you did it unto Me."

In all the great variety of his activities, Father Mooney never lost the enthusiasm, the candor, the simplicity of the child. I suppose that it is his quality, along with his warmth of heart and his Christlike charity, that endeared him most

to his friends, his fellow priests, the Bishops. The companions of his ordinary days remained throughout his life the innermost circle of his friends, but this was not a closed circle.

All who ever came into contact with him, though they did not share his priestly memories and experiences, were impressed by his zeal for life, his interest in the smallest detail of the human scene, his relief for fun, his roguish wrinkle in his eye, his peak of hearty laughter—all these marks of a man whose smile so miraculously had preserved into mature life and the beginnings of old age all the freshness and vitality of his youth.

It is quite proper that gathered here as we are, around his mortal remains we recall the good things we knew about Fr. Mooney, that we too remember that ours is a transitory life, that we must like him come face to face with death. But let us remember also that in life or in death we are all bound together in the communion of saints, and just as the merits of his great work were all that Father Mooney could take with him into the next life, our prayers are all that we can send after him.

May his bereaved brother and sisters, and their children who were always Father Mooney's great pride and joy, find comfort in this assurance of our prayers, and find consolation in the fact in the minds and hearts of the thousands who know him, which Father had left the memory of a great and good priest, a priest who in very truth was "most willing to spend, and be spent himself for the good of their souls."

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