

FEBRUARY 19, 1987 Fr John Carroll, CM



John Carroll was born at Kileenevere, Co. Limerick, in November 1899. His father died when John was two years old and it fell to his mother to bring up John and his sister Agnes. He was sent to school, first to Roscrea and then, in 1914, he followed his uncles and cousin Jerome to Castleknock. In 1918 he entered the seminaire at Blackrock. He lost his mother before he was ordained in 1926 but he and Agnes remained very close throughout their lives; death was to separate them by only four months in the end. John's early career was varied. After ordination he returned to Castleknock, where he was appointed sub-dean for Fr William Meagher. He taught Irish, played rugby and threw himself into the activities of the house with the enthusiasm which was to be characteristic of his life. After a year he was appointed to Lanark from which after a few months he was called to Strawberry Hill as dean. From what we gathered John enjoyed those years in Twickenham with the late Dr James Doyle. No doubt he kept order in the house, but the vignettes from that period were more of golf, the theatre and skating in Richmond Park. From Strawberry Hill he returned to Castleknock, this time as dean.

His next appointment was to Cork, where he joined the mission staff and from which he was sent on loan to the Australian Province. He built up a large circle of friends there among the clergy and the people that remained with him to the end of his life. When war broke out he joined the Australian Army as a military chaplain. He never claimed to have had a distinguished war record, nor did he attempt to trade regimental tales with some of his former chaplain confreres, but he certainly claimed to have enjoyed his period of service. This was spent in various camps in northern Australia and on hospital ships between there and the Red Sea. After the war John returned to the Irish Province. Appointed to Phibsboro he continued to work as a missionary. In 1956 he went to Lanark as Superior and soon established himself with all the denominations and with all sections of the community. He presided with great aplomb over the centenary celebrations of St Mary's. To the end of his days he loved to return there to visit friends in the town, the parish and the golf club.

From Lanark he returned to the mission staff in Phibsboro in 1962 and remained there until he was appointed to Castleknock in 1969. He had intended to continue working as a missionary but within days of his arrival he suffered a severe stroke and this put an end to his active career on the missions. With great determination he fought his way back to mobility. Within months he was hearing the boys' confessions, and saying mass and preaching on chaplaincies. Within the year he was again playing golf, going out in his car and meeting his friends. In the house he had become the grand old man, welcoming all visitors but especially the senior pastmen. One pastman who had known John as dean remarked on his geniality. ... In his last years deafness made communication difficult for him, but he never gave up the effort to live life to the full. When John spoke of himself you became aware that he saw himself essentially as a missionary. The experiences of which he spoke revolved around the missions: parishes, priests, people, sermons, confessions and days of rest. Among his effects we found his collected sermons, all carefully composed and written out in longhand. They were not tracts such as might attract the unbelieving mind. They were rather such as would strengthen the believer and show him how best he might live by the law of the gospel. He spoke of devotions and duties in a faith that was already shared. Knowing John, however, one felt that his person, like that of many of his confreres, gave another dimension to his preaching. His prayer was part of the fabric of his being, the regular part of his life. With his deafness we became the unwilling eavesdroppers on his conversations with our Lord and our Lady. But equally part of that fabric was his enthusiasm for life itself and his acceptance of people, taken as they came. In the last months and weeks John knew that his time was coming to an end. Although there was no evident deterioration in his health he spoke calmly of his approaching death. To one of us he remarked that he had enjoyed every moment of his life. He seemed to have chosen the verb carefully, and he repeated the phrase again. To another of us who visited him when he was sick, just hours before his unexpected death, he asked to be reminded of the final verse of *Abide with me*:

Hold thou thy cross before my closing eyes, Shine through the gloom and point me to the skies.

Heaven's morning breaks and earth's vain shadows flee. In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.

The two remarks seemed to encapsulate the character of the man.

(Denis O'Donovan, CM. From "Colloque", CM Irish Province)