

FEBRUARY 9, 1992 Fr John O'Rourke, CM



Fr John O'Rourke's death came suddenly, the day after he had come home to be with his mother on her 93rd birthday. The following is taken from the eulogy given at his Funeral Liturgy in St Vincent's Ashfield by the Provincial, Fr Gerald Scott, CM.

From the days when some of us first knew John, and his family, we knew him as a person of integrity. And that to my mind is the first aspect that every Vincentian would see in his giftedness.

Of his gifts there were many. I am not sure that physical sport was one of his gifts, recalling some episodes on the golf course when the air, and often the turf, was rent in twain with mighty blows. Yet there was determination, as many of us will recall at the memory of John roaring across the soccer field to ward off an aggressor down the far wing. At that time as a student, one recalls the occasions, more than once or twice, when his shoulder would "pop out".

His undoubted giftedness was most evident in his search for Truth. I have no doubt that this was inherited from home, but perhaps it was strengthened as well by his years at the Dominican University in Manila, Philippines. This quest came in two broad areas: intellectual, and among people, especially poorer people. In the first area of intellect, he was very, very good. His intelligence was as lucid as it was deep; as extensive as it was free. It was no trouble to John to elaborate on anything from theology to gemstones, from science fiction to geology, from the evils of bureaucracy to the details of librarianship. He seemed to either master a subject, especially in his younger days, or to drop it altogether. There were few half-measures in his quest for Truth.

Outstanding among such achievements were some 30 years which he devoted to helping educate students to priesthood, especially diocesan priesthood. He always attended the annual meetings of the National Council of Priests. Another example was his long membership on the National Ecumenical Commission, more precisely known as the Catholic-Lutheran Dialogue.

In the second area of the poorer people, it was another area where John seemed to roam and breathe freely. The Daughters of Charity in Adelaide could speak about John's preference for the people helped by them at Fullarton and Hutt Street. The Latin American and Vietnamese people, amongst others, seemed to draw his instant interest and rapport. In recent years, and to his intense delight, he reveled among such people in Melbourne. I quote from a priest to whom I spoke by phone yesterday, a former student of John's, who later visited him in a house in Melbourne. He said, "It was amazing; while we talked together, people of every shape and size and appearance kept coming through the door; they seemed to know where all the food was kept and helped themselves to it; John was at home with them." Indeed, so strong was his love and his sense of justice for the poor that I have since wondered if his long years in seminary life were in fact a time of sheer endurance – endurance until he could get out and work with the poor. Integrity is seen in the manner in which John accepted suffering in his life, suffering that came from within that great mind of his. Great as was the gift, so much worse was the sense of order he seemed to see lying in tatters around him. Yet, never did I see him surrender. I suggest that this struggle of the mind has much to do with his desire to talk and remain on top of reality at every moment.