

Fr. Kenneth F. MILFORD (1910-1999)

Born on January 14, 1910 at Hazleton, PA, he attended the local primary public school until he entered Cornwells Heights' Spiritan Seminary for High School and two years of college, 1924-31. His studies there were interrupted by two years from 1926 on while he held a job and examined his vocation. He ended up returning to Cornwells. He made his first vows at Ridgefield, CT, on August 21, 1932 and did his senior seminary studies at Ferndale, Norwalk, CT, where he was ordained on September 8, 1937. He also earned his B.A. there.

His first assignment took him to Puerto Rico in 1938. He labored there first at Arecibo as an assistant in that very busy parish with its numerous out-stations in the mountains. He learned Spanish so well that he was as fluent in it as in his native language. In 1940 he moved to the newly opened mission at Hato Rey as assistant, and in 1943 we find him as pastor of the three parishes of Toa Alta, Toa Baja and Dorado. Together they counted 36,000 people, many of them living in their numerous barrios in the mountains. He built several chapels for them and by dint of hard work he managed to start a revival of the faith.

In 1952 he became pastor of San Juan Bautista Parish in Orocovis. This parish in the mountains covered 60 square miles and, including its barrios, had a population of about 25,000. For 35 years a hard-working secular priest, Fr. Martin Barry had served it when the Spiritans were asked to take over. It was one of the best parishes when Father Milford arrived there with a team of two assistants, soon raised to three. One year later they reported 5,000 Easter Communion and ten times as many total Communion. The new Padres went to work with gusto. They established a network of catechetical centers that would reach the total of 85, staffed by 350 catechists. The priests visited eight of its 19 barrios each week, offering Mass at least once a month. They established confraternities or societies for men and women and the Children of Mary for the young. The central church of the parish needed four Masses each Sunday to take care of the people, 2,000 of them receiving Holy Communion each Sunday. Needless to say, they also built many chapels in the barrios.

After a brief stay at Hato Rey as its pastor in 1960, he was transferred the following year to Juncos for another five years of hard work. Then after 28 years his labors in Puerto Rico came to an end. How highly he was regarded in Puerto Rico was shown by the municipal governments of Toa Alta, Orocovis and Juncos, who declared him adopted son of these towns, while the Lions Club chose him as their man of the year. In 1966 we find him in California, first as pastor of Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish, Bakersfield, and then as pastor of St. Catherine Parish in Riverside. By 1970 he became pastor of St. John's Parish in Tucson, AZ.

When in 1972 an emergency arose in the Spiritan mission in Mexico, he volunteered for it, saying he'd like to return to some more demanding work than that of being pastor in the U.S.A. Being well-equipped for it, he replaced ailing Fr. George C. Reardon of Santa Anna Parish and its out-stations among the Indians at Tanlajas in the Diocese of Ciudad Valles, S.L.P. He arrived just in time to celebrate the 200th anniversary of this church, repaired it and built its central Spiritan community house. All this, of course, in addition to the usual work of a pastor in both the town and its out-stations.

Recalled to California in 1975, he served as director of vocations at Bakersfield and Riverside until in 1978 he was stationed at Our Lady of the Valley Parish, Hemet, CA, as its pastor. Officially retired in 1985, he still rendered service as associate pastor at San Jacinto until in 1998 he entered the retirement home at Hemet. He went to his heavenly reward in the local hospital on July 16, 1999. He had been a priest for 52 years. Interment took place at Hemet's Spiritan community cemetery.

Throughout his life he was known to pay attention to details that helped him serve people: "He never forgot a single thing that he saw and he saw everything; he knew everything they needed; even if they didn't recognize the need, he recognized it." No wonder that he earned the gratitude of his superiors for the exemplary way he performed his ministry wherever he was sent.