

A Missionary Priest Returns Home

Ed. note – On September 3, 2001, Bishop Raymond J. Boland typed out a document called “My Personal Funeral Arrangements,” explaining his desire to be buried in Ireland. The document is a classic example of Bishop Boland’s spirit and style, and so we share it in full.

In God’s providence the life I now enjoy will some day come to an end. Whether it will be as the result of a lingering illness or whether it will come suddenly I know not.

Now that my life is certainly far beyond the half way stage I have been thinking of a last resting place and something keeps drawing me back to the land of my parents, the land I knew so intimately before I became a missionary priest.

Maybe I am influenced by the lines of his own Requiem which Robert Louis Stevenson penned for himself:

Under the wide and starry sky,
Dig the grave and let me lie.
Glad did I live and gladly die,
And I laid me down with a will.

This be the verse you grave for me:
Here he lies where he longed to be;
Home is the sailor, home from the sea,
And the hunter home from the hill.

Maybe this missionary should go home also, as it were, to complete the circle. There are, of course, two circles. The smaller one confines our life to a finite cycle of years; the larger one knows no bounds, beginningless and endless in that infinity which is the playground of our God. Some say one can’t go home again but, in reality, we all do. And that is why, almost symbolically, I would like to be buried in Ireland.

I once had three places in mind but I have now settled on one, namely, along with other priests, on the right hand side (see map) beneath the shadow of St. Michael’s Church in Tipperary, Ireland. This is the parish church where my mother served as a member of the Altar Society, where my parents were married in January, 1931 and where I was baptized in February, 1932. It is also the place where my maternal grandmother introduced me to the sights, sounds and smells of Benediction on the many occasions when, as a youngster, I visited the town of my birth. Within the grounds of this sacred place memory recalls a feeling of that peace which is a foretaste of heaven.

Mallow-born Thomas Davis asked the question, "Shall they bury me....under the shade of Cathedral domes?" "Oh, no!" he replied and his desires are mine also.

No! on an Irish green hill-side,
On an opening lawn – but not too wide;
For I love the drip of the wetted trees -
I love not the gales, but a gentle breeze,
To freshen the turf.....

When I look back upon my life thus far it is obvious that God has blessed me in many ways. For that reason I would hope that my passing will not bring sorrow or pain to others because I will be sharing the happiness promised by the Lord of compassion and love. It is my prayer and I only ask that, on my behalf, it be yours too, at least for a little while, that the God of mercy will be waiting to welcome me home.

Maybe Tennyson said it best:

Sunset and evening star,
And one clear call for me!
And may there be no moaning of the bar,
When I put out to sea,
But such a tide as moving seems asleep,
Too full for sound and foam,
When that which drew from out the boundless deep
Turns again home.

Twilight and evening bell,
And after that the dark!
And may there be no sadness of farewell,
When I embark;
For though from out our bourne of Time and Place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crossed the bar.

So my choice is Tipperary. With the cooperation of and through the courtesy of St. Michael's Pastor, Archdeacon Matthew McGrath, V.G. the actual site has been chosen. As one faces the church it is located on the right hand side, immediately inside the railing and immediately behind the grave of Father James O'Neill, coincidentally also an All Hallows College graduate. He died in Tipperary in 1911 while home on

sick leave from his parish of St. Mary's in Castlemaine, Victoria, Australia. In the History of St. Michael's Parish published in 1999 the O'Neill grave is numbered #8 on page 41 which reproduces a simple plan of the graves on the south side of the church. The attached map is an enlarged copy of the layout. The current Archbishop of Cashel and Emly, the Most Rev. Dermot Clifford, D.D. is aware of my wishes and has given his approval.

Some may wonder why I have not decided to be buried in Kansas City. The answer is simple. The Diocese does not have a specific place for its bishops. Currently the former bishops of Kansas City are buried in three different cemeteries and even then not always in the same location, e.g. Hogan and Lillis. If my presence here needs to be acknowledged then I would have no objection to a plaque in a suitable place which indicates where I am, in fact, interred. Sic transit gloria mundi!