

SACRAMENTO DIOCESAN ARCHIVES

Vol 5

Father John E Boll

No 70

Father Matthias Joseph O'Callaghan

Native of Knockane, Donoughmore, County Cork, Ireland

Priest of the Diocese of Sacramento

Pastor Emeritus of Saint Monica Parish, Willows, California

March 30, 1932 – April 9, 2009



Matthias Joseph O’Callaghan, youngest son of six children born to Michael O’Callaghan and Ellen Ryan, was born on March 30, 1932 in Knockane, Donoughmore, County Cork, Ireland. Matthias had one sister and four brothers. His brothers Michael and Thomas became priests. The children in the family in order of birth were Michael, John, Mossie, Thomas Dominic, Albina and Matthias.

BEGINS HIS EDUCATION

Matt began his education in 1936 at the young age of four when he entered Firmount National School in Donoughmore, County Cork. He was a student in this National School until 1945. Matt’s father Michael died in 1941 when Matt was just nine years of age.

From 1945 to 1950, Matt did his secondary studies at Mount Melleray, Cappoquin, County Waterford. After graduation from Mount Melleray, he returned to Cork and continued his studies at University College, Cork from 1950 to 1952. He then attended the Radio Telegraph Institute for Marine Officers in Tivoli, County Cork, for two years and graduated with a First Class Certificate in Radio Communications. He then spent two years at sea with the British Merchant Marines from 1954 to 1956.



Photo from Sacramento Diocesan Archives

Mount Melleray College

DISCERNING HIS VOCATION

In an interview with the *Catholic Herald* by Nancy Westlund in April, 2009, Matt said he exerted a fair amount of energy running away from a vocation to the priesthood. There was a time when he wanted to be a doctor, but since “there were already two doctors in the family,” he signed on

for two years with the British Navy as a communication officer. “It became boring after a while,” he said. “All you saw was water.”

One day he sat down for a heart-to-heart talk with his elder brother Michael who was a priest. “He told me I had a vocation to the priesthood and just hadn’t admitted it,” Matt said. “We all need direction, so here I am 45 years later.”

MATTHIAS ENTERS SAINT KIERAN COLLEGE

After serving as a Merchant Marine for two years, Matt responded to the call of God to be a priest and entered Saint Kieran College in County Kilkenny in 1956 to begin his theological studies, completing them in 1962.



Saint Kieran College Seminary, Kilkenny, Ireland

ORDAINED A PRIEST

Matthias Joseph O’Callaghan was ordained a priest by Bishop Dunne on June 3, 1962 in Saint Mary Cathedral, Kilkenny, for service in the Diocese of Sacramento.

After his ordination to the priesthood, Father Matt spent some time at home with his family before he bid farewell to his mother Ellen, his four brothers and one sister, and his friends as he began his long journey to Sacramento, California where his life of priestly ministry in Northern California awaited him.

Father Matt gives his first blessing to his mother Ellen and his two priest brothers, Father Michael, a priest of the Archdiocese of Liverpool, and his brother Father Thomas, a priest of the Archdiocese of Seattle.

"Thou art a Priest forever."
 O Jesus, Eternal Priest, grant to my dear father the peace of Heaven: Bless my mother, brothers, sister, relatives, and all those who have helped me to become Thy Priest

✠

In Happy Remembrance
 of my
 Ordination to the Priesthood
 at
 St. Mary's Cathedral,
 Kilkenny
 June 3rd, 1962

✠

Matthias J. O'Callaghan
 (Sacramento)

✠

Sweet Jesus, help me to be a holy Priest.
 Mary, my Mother, help me in the service of thy Son
 PLEASE PRAY FOR ME



Photos courtesy of Elizabeth Cott, Niece



The O'Callaghan Family on Father Tom O'Callaghan's Ordination Day

Back Row, L-R, Brothers John and Mossie

Front Row, L-R: Matt; Albina, sister; Father Tom, brother; Helena, mother; and Father Michael, brother

BEGINNING OF MINISTRY IN SACRAMENTO



Father Edward Christen
Pastor of St Peter Church

After his arrival in Sacramento, Father Matt received his first appointment from Bishop Alden J Bell, newly installed bishop of Sacramento, to Saint Peter Parish in Sacramento to work with Father Edward Christen, founding pastor of the parish which was established in 1955.

After experiencing the “culture shock” that goes with moving from Ireland to California’s Capital, Father Matt found himself right at home. He spent his first five years of ministry at Saint Peter Parish as an assistant from September 28, 1962 to September 15, 1967.

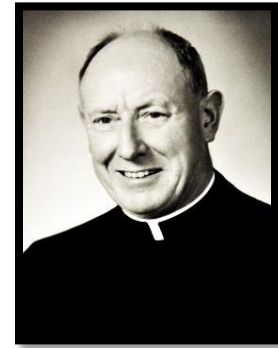


Photo by John E Boll

Saint Peter Church, Sacramento

ASSISTANT PASTOR, SAINT DOMINIC PARISH, ORLAND

Father O’Callaghan’s second assignment was to Saint Dominic Parish in the small town of Orland on the I-5 corridor of the Sacramento Valley where he served as assistant pastor to Father Thomas Boland beginning on September 15, 1967. He served the Saint Dominic Parish community as a parochial vicar for the next five years until January 25, 1972.



Father Thomas Boland

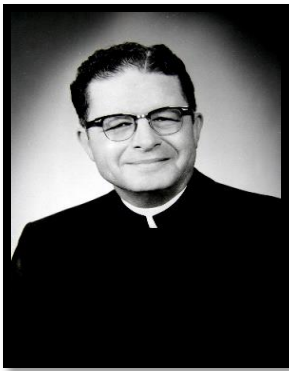


Photo by John E Boll

Saint Dominic Parish, Orland

THIRD APPOINTMENT, OUR LADY OF GRACE PARISH

Bishop Alden J Bell next appointed Father O’Callaghan to his last assignment as an assistant to Our Lady of Grace Parish in West Sacramento. Father Eymard Gallagher, Editor of the *Catholic Herald*, was the pastor of the parish. Father Matt’s appointment to the parish in West Sacramento became effective on January 25, 1972.



Since Father Gallagher had to be away from the parish during the day because of his job as editor of the diocesan newspaper, Father Matt's responsibility was taking care of the daily pastoral duties of the parish. He served in this capacity until Father Gallagher stepped down as editor of the *Catholic Herald* and was then appointed to a new assignment as pastor of Our Lady of the Presentation Parish in East Sacramento.

Father Eymard J Gallagher

FATHER O'CALLAGHAN NAMED PASTOR OF OUR LADY OF GRACE PARISH

On July 1, 1975, Father Matthias O'Callaghan was appointed to his first pastorate of Our Lady of Grace Parish in West Sacramento. After serving the parish as an assistant four three years, he became pastor of the same parish for the next nineteen years, from 1975 to July 31, 1994.



Photo by John E Boll

Our Lady of Grace Church, West Sacramento

At the age of 43, Father Matt began his first pastorate in the parish he had served as assistant pastor. He was a most dedicated priest who loved his ministry and loved life. He became the beloved pastor of the children, teenagers, adults, elderly and the sick of the parish. He visited the children at the school every Thursday morning and was present to each child in the school and knew each child by name.

Sister Michael Henry Moulin, DHS, who served as principal of the parish school for nineteen years, says that Father Matt “visited the sick and elderly and attended all school and parish meetings and functions. He was an avid reader and had a wealth of knowledge. He was ready to help anyone who needed to talk, was an excellent homilist and prepared a different homily for each Mass on Sunday, three different homilies each Sunday. He always prepared an inspirational homily for daily Mass as well. He was a true spiritual gift to the parish community.

“Father Matt loved to play golf and swim. Telling jokes and making people laugh brought him great joy. He was a beautiful example of strength, strength to live life fully and strength to accept death when it came.”



GOLDEN & SILVER JUBILARIANS 1987

*Back Row (left to right): Rev. Thomas Dermody (Sacramento), Rev. Stephen Carey (Camden, N. J.), Mr. Norman Wilkinson (Dublin), Rev. Anthony Owens (Hexham and Newcastle), Rev. Paul Fitzgerald (Ossory).
Row 2: Rev. Matthias J. O'Callaghan (Sacramento), Rev. James Nolan (Southwark), Rev. Seamus McGivern (Hexham and Newcastle), Rev. Daniel Cody (St. Augustine, Fla.), Rev. Anthony Brady (Maitland), Rev. John O'Donoghue (Southwark), Rev. Richard Phelan (Ossory), Rev. Nicholas Duggan (Sacramento), Rev. Mark Carroll (Hexham and Newcastle).
Front Row: Rev. Martin Campion (College President), Rev. Michael Breslin (Southwark), Most Rev. Laurence Ryan (Kildare and Leighlin), Most Rev. Laurence Forristal (Ossory), Most Rev. Robert Healy (Perth), Rev. John Cass (Bathurst), Rev. Denis Ryan (Sydney; ordained in Thurles, 1937).
Absent: V. Rev. Canon Thomas Bowden (Ossory).*

Father Matt Celebrates his Silver Anniversary at Saint Kieran Seminary, Kilkenny, Ireland

TWO POEMS BY AN OLG SCHOOL FIFTH GRADER ABOUT FATHER MATT O'CALLAGHAN

FATHER MATT

A Poem by Robert Mistler
Fifth Grader
Our Lady of Grace School

Father Matt, you have many qualities of a saint,
A kind, loving person is the picture of you we paint.

Father Matt, you are a role model for all at OLG.
You are a part of our lives, someone who holds a key.

Father Matt, you are real and not a fake.
Without you here, life would have been no piece of cake.

We will miss your Thursday visits to OLG School,
And all your jokes and stories that we thought were so cool.

The new place where you are going, may not realize
That you've taught us to love and made us more wise.

We will look to replace you, we will look out and in.
Maybe if we're lucky, we'll find your unknown, lost twin.

Father Matt, you have done so much for our school and our church.
For another one like you will be a never ending search.

We will always love you and for you we'll always care.
So don't you forget us now – don't you dare.

Keep telling your jokes and fill others with laughter and fun.
And good luck on hitting your holes in one.

While your hitting that golf ball and yelling out "four".
We'll be thinking of you and loving you forever more.

For you won't be forgotten; No we won't forget your face.
You'll be in our hearts forever, while you're in another place.

Good luck to you in life and in all that you may do.
Don't forget us at OLG and we will never forget you.



Photo courtesy of Sister Michael Henry Moulin, DHS

Father Matt Celebrates Mass for the Parish Community

FATHER MATT O'CALLAGHAN

A Poem by Robert Mistler

**So many good things to say about this man
We all know him well – he's Father O'Callaghan.**

**He has spent his life spreading the word of the Lord
And through his mission, has never been bored.**

**When you have a problem or are in a mess
To him you can come with trust to confess.**

**He takes the time – his heart he will lend
He is a very special – friend.**

**His sense of humor is one of a kind
He makes us laugh and lets us unwind.**

In each Sunday's sermon, he shares a life story
Times of his childhood, days filled with glory.

Father O'Callaghan works hard every day
What does he do to sometimes get away?

I know his secret. A day on the green,
Playing golf – like you've never seen!!

He has chosen this way of life as you can see
Not only for himself, but for you and for me.

Father, without you I just don't know
How our faith and love would grow and grow.

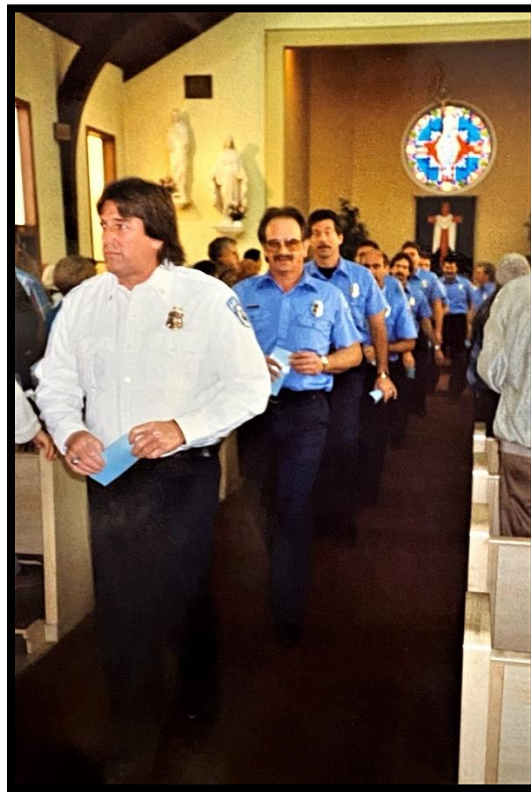
So many more words I can say about this man
All dedicated to you, Father O'Callaghan!

ANNUAL HONORING OF THE LOCAL POLICE AND FIREFIGHTERS

Father Matt had the practice of honoring the local police and firefighters of West Sacramento each year at a separate Mass for each group. He wanted parishioners to be aware of the men and women who daily put their lives on the line for them in the local community.



The West Sacramento Police and Firefighters



West Sacramento Firefighters



OUR LADY OF GRACE SCHOOL
First Holy Communion May 1, 1988
Sister Michael Henry **Father Matthias O'Callaghan**
Principal **Mrs. Barbara Price - Teacher** **Pastor**

A LETTER FROM A PARISHIONER

16 February, 1994

Dear Father O'Callaghan,

Again this past Sunday, you and Sister Michael provided the parish another fine ceremony. The meaning of marriage and Valentine's Day was nicely emphasized in your celebration of Mass. All the couples included in it came away with a special feeling and appreciated your efforts.

Your sermons have continued at their very high level of excellence, Father. Over this past year I've had the occasion to send either copies or tapes of them to my children. Your messages are always well thought out and are easily converted to times in our individual lives where we need guidance. My daughter especially needs such support. I sincerely hope she heeds the advice and profits from the examples you provide in your homilies I send her.

Virtually every Sunday your sermons elicit discussion among those of us who gather afterwards for breakfast. Everyone has good things to say about your observations every time! It's amazing how you find a relevant issue in each of our lives every week that ties into the Gospel. Often we take much of our existence for granted and, in doing so, overlook how our activities could take on "real meaning" if we associated them more closely with God's intent for us.

Quite often I listen to your tapes while taking my daily walk. No matter how often I listen to any particular sermon, there is always "something new" that comes out each time it's played. I hope others tell you just how much they profit from your discourses. Thanks, Father Matt, for all your inspiration and counsel.

Sincerely,

Name withheld

WILLOWS, FATHER MATT'S FINAL PASTORATE

After nineteen years as pastor of Our Lady of Grace Parish in West Sacramento, Father Matt, at the age of 62, was ready to begin his final pastorate at Saint Monica Parish in Willows. He began that pastorate on August 1, 1994 and served the Willows parish community for the next thirteen years until June 30, 2007, the year he celebrated his seventy-fifth year of life.



Photo by John E Boll

Saint Monica Church, Willows

Father Matt kept the parish facilities in good condition, installing new roofs on parish buildings as needed. Parishioner Aileen Carrier, who coordinated the parish's Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults ministry, said she found the new pastor to be "a very good organizer, and a pretty introspective person who really cares about people."

For Barbara Linquist, parish bookkeeper, listening to Father Matt's homilies at the 7:30 am weekday Mass was "a great way to start the day. Father O'Callaghan's homilies always had a message," said Linquist, who was among the "regulars" who left Mass ready to "go out and solve all the day's problems."

Describing Father Matt as "a good friend with a great sense of humor," Mrs Linquist holds a special place in her heart for Father Matt because during his tenure as pastor, her daughter became the first female altar server at Saint Monica Church.

FATHER MATT RETIRES IN WILLOWS

About a year before his retirement, Father Matt was diagnosed with colon cancer and had surgery to remove the cancer. A parish family who were good friends with Father Matt took care of him during his post-surgery recuperation and had a double wide mobile home brought to their property where Father Matt could live in retirement.

Father Matt began his retirement on July 1, 2007 and was named Pastor Emeritus of Saint Monica Parish by Bishop Weigand. At the time of his retirement, he had recuperated from his surgery and was feeling fine again. Succeeding him as pastor of Willows was Father Maurice O'Brien. Father Mossie would see Father Matt almost daily when he would stop by the parish to pick up his mail.

A few months after his retirement, the cancer returned and Father Matt began chemotherapy at Enloe Hospital in Chico. The cancer continued its attack on Father Matt's body and he ended up back in the hospital in Chico. Father Mossie O'Brien went to see Father Matt in the Chico hospital and Father Matt was delighted. He wanted to go to confession that night to Father Mossie and the next morning, Holy Thursday, April 9, 2009, Father Matt died suddenly and unexpectedly.

FUNERAL FOR FATHER MATTHIAS O'CALLAGHAN

The Vigil for Father Matt was held in Saint Monica Church, Willows, where he had been pastor for thirteen years. At the Vigil on Tuesday, April 21, 2009, Sister Michael Henry Moulin, DHS, longtime principal at Our Lady of Grace School in West Sacramento and friend of Father Matt, spoke at the Vigil. Her remarks follow.

REMARKS BY SISTER MICHAEL HENRY MOULIN, DHS

A favorite quote of Father Matt was: "Trifles lead to perfection and perfection is no trifle" His favorite dessert was trifle!

Father loved life – He wanted us to love and enjoy life – that's why he would tell us jokes every occasion he could. To be able to make us laugh made him happy. That's why – during his two short years of retirement – he had such a hard time accepting not being able to be up and about doing things for others.



Sr Michael Henry

If he couldn't be upbeat and make you laugh, and God knows, he didn't have much to laugh about with cancer, shingles, fractured pelvis, hospital, rehab and chemo, he'd prefer you wouldn't be there; only because he was frustrated at not being able to BE the person he wanted to be. Even then, one time when I called – he asked if I needed any shingles at my little place? I usually took him literally, so asked what kind – to see if I could use them!

Whenever Father seemed curt or abrupt – it had nothing to do with us – he was hurting – impatient with himself – frustrated. He was really crying out to understand himself and to be understood.

When Father was in West Sacramento, he would come to school every Thursday morning – he would visit each classroom – be present to each child (just in case they had something heavy on their heart and wanted to share – which they did). He knew each child by name! During recess, he would talk with the teachers. Everyone on staff would look forward to Thursdays – he was our ray of sunshine!

Thursday afternoons – he would visit the convalescent home. On other days, he would visit the sick and elderly in their homes. He was always the JOY of the sick and elderly and those who cared for them.

Every morning, at morning Mass, he would give a little homily – which would give you energy for the day and food for thought. I couldn't wait to share what he said with my students and coworkers.

On Sundays, his homilies were so well prepared – we were so spiritually well-fed! One Sunday, his homily was just what I needed – so, I went back to the next Mass with paper and pencil – to take notes – he gave a different homily! When I confronted him, he said – it's a different crowd of people – I try to adapt it to them. Imagine a different homily for every Mass! What an inspiration!

As principal, I would pray with my teachers every Thursday morning before school. After Father came to Willows – every once in a while, I would play a tape that I recorded of Father's homily – one of my teachers who did not know Father said, "No wonder you people miss him!"

Father loved to read, to recite poetry, to swim, play golf, ride the stationery bike, and listen to music! Father's dad died because he would not go see a doctor. Father had total faith in his doctors – he was always impressed by the staff at Enloe Hospital. He would say – they are so positive – helping each other. He was always inspired by them!

He was always happy to see someone as an adult that he knew as a child!

He was so impressed with those of you who made his home possible! Ever so grateful!; who drove him back and forth to the hospital/clinic/doctors' appointments. You people were his rainbow – in the midst of the rain! He could not praise you enough! And was ever so grateful!

Another person he was so grateful for was Father O'Brien! He would tell me how good you were to him!

Father Matt used to say that "to have been a success in life was to have lived well, laughed often and loved much!" Father certainly was a success!

Father Tom O'Callaghan, you can be so proud of your brother. Elizabeth, (the only niece in the family), you can be so proud of your uncle! Bishop and fellow priests, you were so lucky to have such a dedicated priest in your diocese! AND, last but not least, we were so blessed to have had Father Matt as our spiritual guide!

Let us close our eyes and hear Father Matt say to each of us:

**“May the roads rise to meet you,
May the wind be always at your back,
May the sunshine warm your face,
And until we meet again (in Heaven),
May God hold you in the palm of His hand.”**

FUNERAL MASS FOR FATHER MATTHIAS O'CALLAGHAN

The following day, Wednesday, April 22, 2009, the Funeral Mass for Father Matthias O'Callaghan was celebrated in the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament in Sacramento with Bishop Jaime Soto as the principal celebrant. Bishop William K Weigand, Bishop Emeritus of the diocese, was a concelebrant at the Mass as were a large number of priests from the diocese.

The homilist at the Funeral Mass was Father Thomas O'Callaghan, Father Matt's older brother who was a retired priest of the Archdiocese of Seattle.

Fellow priests, religious and laypeople who worked with Father Matt in ministry will remember him for his thoughtful homilies, his loyalty to friends, his spontaneous laughter, and his enthusiasm for life, even in the midst of his recent chemotherapy treatment to battle cancer.

Father Maurice O'Brien who succeeded Father Matt as pastor of Willows said, "Father Matt made loyal and faithful friends wherever he went in the diocese. He had a sharp and clear mind and was an avid reader. He had thousands of books that likely led to his good homilies."

BURIAL

After the Funeral Mass in the Cathedral, the body of Father Matthias Joseph O'Callaghan was taken in procession to Saint Mary Cemetery in Sacramento where the Rite of Committal was prayed as the body of Father Matt was returned to Mother Earth, as his spirit lifted in joyful flight to the glory of the Kingdom of God.

Lord, Grant Eternal Peace to Father Matt



Photo by John E Boll

**Headstone of Father Matthias Joseph O'Callaghan
Saint Mary Cemetery, Sacramento**

FINAL WORDS FROM FATHER MATT O'CALLAGHAN

“Relatives and Friends, I am about to leave; my last breath does not say “Goodbye,” for my love for you is truly timeless, beyond the touch of boney death. I leave myself to your memory, with love. I leave my thoughts, my laughter, and my dreams to you whom I have treasured beyond gold and precious gems. I give you what no thief can steal, the memories of our times together, the tender, love-filled moments, the successes we have shared, the hard times that brought us closer together, and the roads we have walked side by side.

“I also leave you a solemn promise that after I am home with God, I will still be present, whenever and wherever you call on me. My energy will be drawn to you by the magnet of our love. Whenever you are in need, call me; I will come to you, with my arms full of wisdom and light to open up your blocked paths, to untangle your knots and to be your avenue to God.

“And all I have with me as I leave is your love and the millions of memories of all that we have shared. So I truly enter my new life as a millionaire. Fear not, nor grieve at my departure, you whom I have loved so much, for my roots and yours are forever intertwined.

“Stroll through life slowly and smell the roses. Trifles lead to perfection and perfection is no trifle.”



Photo Courtesy of Elizabeth Cott, Niece

L-R, Matt and his brother John with two Neighbors on the Farm in Ireland



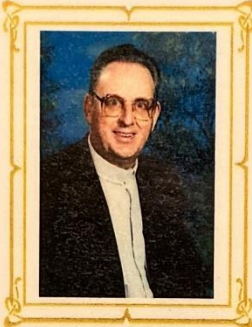
Photo courtesy of Elizabeth Cott

Father Matt on Holiday in Ireland with Tiger the Cat

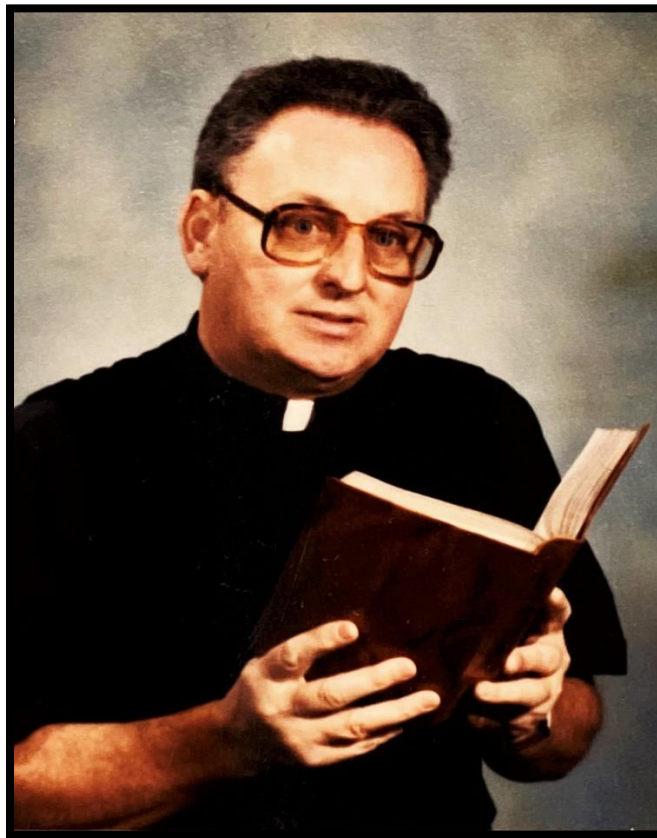


Donal & Liz Cott, Father Matt's Niece and husband, with Father Matt at a Pub in Ireland

JESUS, MARY, JOSEPH



Sacred Heart Of Jesus
Have mercy on the soul of
Father Matthias J. O'Callaghan
Knockane, Donoughmore, Co. Cork, Ireland
Pastor, Sacramento California U.S.A.
"Oh! You, Whom I have loved
So much on earth. Pray for Me
And live in such a manner
that we may be reunited
for ever in Heaven."
St. Bonaventure
Died Holy Thursday, April 9th 2009



AN IRISHMAN'S PHILOSOPHY

There are only two things to worry about
either you are well or you are sick.

If you are well,
then there is nothing to worry about.

But if you are sick,
there are two things to worry about,
either you will get well or you will die.

If you get well,
there is nothing to worry about.

If you die,
there are only two things to worry about,
either you will go to heaven or hell.

If you go to heaven there is nothing to worry about.

But if you go to hell,
you'll be so damn busy shaking hands with friends
you won't have time to worry!

WHY WORRY

A cartoon illustration with a green border decorated with shamrocks. It depicts three scenarios: 1. A man in a white shirt drinking beer and holding grapes. 2. A man with a halo playing a harp in a heavenly setting. 3. Two red devils shaking hands in a hellish setting. The text is centered in the middle of the illustration.

Syd.

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