

Eulogy for Sr Teresa Mc Manus dmj



Teresa was born in Ireland, County Longford, at Esker, 16th July 1924 the daughter of Thomas and Kate (née Dunleavy). She made her first profession on 29th August 1949 and her final vows on 5th August 1954.

During her years in Burundi, she worked mainly in Busiga, not only on material things, like the catering for the school's but she always had a keen attention to the poor and the marginalised, mainly the Batwa (a tribe connected with the pygmies), the prisoners and the poor people of the area. She was very faithful to the visits to the prisons in Ngozi, males and females, and was attentive to set up programs like literacy, accountability, English, French, etc. She had a very good library for the prisoners, so good that sometimes the civil authorities

would ask her to rent a book ... and she would tease them, saying that they had to go to prison!

Teresa was able to ask some prisoners, who were more educated, to help the others who were not. She was also attentive to the living conditions of the prisoners, distributing food, blankets, soap, or helping them to defend their rights e.g. when they should have been let out into the compound and were kept in. Every Sunday as far as she could, she was at mass at the prison, or if there was no priest, she would be there for the Sunday service.

She had a great sense of humour and that helped her to say what she wanted, even to the authorities, and they would accept that because they loved her.

After some time, the Daughters of Mary and Joseph had to leave Burundi, Teresa included. I heard that Teresa was the first asked back by the Bishop because of her work with the prisoners. When she came back she stayed in Ngozi and organised the activities in the two prisons from there. She would insist on going to see the prisoners. She did not drive, occasionally she got a lift – but most of the time she rode a bicycle. She was always on her bike, moving in and out of the house, of the prison, of the store she had at the diocesan headquarters, busy for the prisoners. Many were the times when she fell off – and the community tried to stop her from riding, but she would not hear of not going to the prisoners – dead or alive!

Everybody who approached her in Busiga and Ngozi loved her and enjoyed her great sense of humour and her availability to be there for those rejected by society.

The sisters in Belgium, who knew her in Africa, admired her for her love of the poor, the neglected, and the way she defended them with courage.

Teresa used to visit Uganda from Burundi. The sisters there enjoyed and loved her sense of humour and her funny stories.

But in 1999 she had to leave Burundi, once again, but this time for medical reasons. It was very much against her wishes and her heart's desire. To begin with she was in Belgium at the Clos where she would sit with Sr. Josephine Beebwa and cry bitterly and inconsolably. It was a very hard time for her, as she had left her heart in Burundi with the people and sisters there. But with God's grace she got through it.

Eventually Teresa came to join us here in England.

Teresa spent some time in New Addington when she first arrived with Sr Joan O'Donoghue and the community there. They were very devoted to the care of refugees and the homeless who were very much part of Teresa's heart.

One sister, who had known Teresa for many years, said that she had always found Teresa a very loving person who was very simple and sensitive towards the poor and marginalised.

After that she was in Thornton Heath. She wrote to say that she felt very much at home in this community and loved the parish and parishioners. Teresa described her time there "I talked to all the people coming out of church, went to SVP meetings and visited the Manor Nursing Home once a week, as well as visiting individuals. Every two weeks I visited the refugee centre". And she went to Bingo on a Wednesday! Which, she wrote, she found "very amusing". Then Teresa came to St Anne's Court, here on the Wickham site, where she was well looked after by Sr Etty and her team. And, when it closed, she was given the choice of where she wanted to go. She chose St Peter's Vauxhall and moved in on 10th December 2004. She loved the sisters there and was very happy.

Teresa was an avid reader and loved books – in fact, once when I visited her in St Peter's I heard whispers from some of the residents complaining that Teresa had taken the new book from the library first and someone else was supposed to have it first. But Teresa, being a bit deaf, didn't hear the comments and went on oblivious, – I am sure it was not the only time she did it.

She was attached to Sydenham Community during her time in St Peter's and they regularly visited her. The Sisters and staff looked after her very well but, in 2005, after a fall which resulted in a complex fracture of her lower femur, she had a period in hospital and, as she needed more nursing care, once again, reluctantly she had to move on. This time this took her into Coloma Court Care Home where she was very well looked after until her death.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the staff at Coloma Court for their care of Teresa.

Teresa was always thankful. Just after the celebrations of her Golden Jubilee, she wrote a note to the then Provincial thanking her and the sisters of the Province for “the great joy and happiness she experienced and their shared love”.

Teresa was very devoted to her family and they, in turn, were devoted to her. She tried to listen and support them when there were problems and asked for the support of our prayers. Her family, in turn, were also very devoted to her and came over to see her in these latter years very regularly and as often as they were able.

Nearly two years ago her family were over with us to celebrate Teresa’s Diamond Jubilee, 60 years of Religious life, and her fidelity to the path God had chosen for her. She had willingly and devotedly followed that path through the cross of her illness which had dictated that she had to give up all that she loved in Burundi and return to England for health reasons. But her heart was always in Burundi. Even during her last days she said she still missed news of Burundi but said “I must be detached”.

Teresa found Africa, Burundi in particular, her home. Even the day before she died she touched her chest close to her heart and said: “Burundi – that is where I want to go and be.” With that tears filled her eyes.

Hospitality and generosity were big things in her life. She shared everything she had. Teresa loved a glass of Baileys and one day, when our sisters Dona and Josephine visited her at Coloma, even though it was 10.00 am, Teresa insisted that they take a glass of Baileys. “In Africa the custom is that you never refuse a bite or drink from your host,” she said. She insisted on accompanying them to the entrance in her wheelchair because “Seeing people off – is your big custom in Africa is it not?”

She had adapted to Africa very well. Eventually she also adapted to England and we, as a Region, were very happy to have her with us. She had suffered a great deal of pain in recent months, and we were so grateful that on 13th August 2011 she died very peacefully.

Teresa herself chose the readings for this mass and I think that they express a lot about how she lived her life and how she trusted in her God.

May she rest in peace and attain her final reward.