

EXILES' REST

If I told you a man of the cloth founded a home for 400 indigent men and 130 indigent women. That he started a day care center for 100 children and a free lunch room that distributed 6 million meals and 500 food baskets a week to indigent families. If I went on that he established a home for 300 indigent African-American men, a health education program, partially funded by recycling glass and metal containers, a "potters" field with 200 plots and helped finance it all by publishing and selling a magazine written by the poor, you might ask me what a tv preacher had to do with the AOH, Division #1.

But there is more. This man of God mediated nearly 50 labor disputes and even acted as a peacemaker when competition between gangs of mobsters broke out in a shooting war.

This peacemaker, friend to the poor, conscience of the community, was none other than Father Tim Dempsey, or more accurately, Right Reverend Monsignor Timothy Dempsey, who honors us as namesake of our Division.

Father Tim was born on October 21, 1867, in Cadanstown, County Offaly, then Kings County, Ireland. It was the same year the Clan na Gael was founded in New York, and the year of the Fenian uprising. His best friend growing up was Joe McAllister, a Protestant, and it was said that "of the one hundred souls who lived in Cadanstown, probably ninety-eight thought of the inseparable boys as limbs of Satan; the other two were the boys' mothers". But because he had been dedicated to the Church at birth, even though he was the first born, he was studying for the priesthood by the age of thirteen. He studied at the National School at Mullingar, then on to Navan College, and finally to St. Patrick's College for seminary at Carlow. He was ordained a priest on June 14, 1891, and soon was sent to America. The years between his birth and ordination made him witness to important events in Irish history. The Church of Ireland was disestablished, Home Rule began, Parnell rose to lead the Home Rule Party, the Land League was founded, and the Land Wars began, Home Rule was defeated, and Parnell disgraced. They also saw the population decline from 5.4 million in 1871 to 4.7 million in 1891.

After earlier assignments in Moberly, Indiana Creek, Holy Angels, at 14th and LaSalle, and Assumption on Sidney Street, in 1898 he was assigned to his desired post at St. Patrick's, celebrating his first Mass there on July 4, 1898.

Father Tim saw much that distressed him at St. Patrick's. Poor immigrants and vagabonds peopled the Parish. He called it "the greatest neighborhood in the City". With Poles, Lithuanians, Italians, Czechs, and "just enough Irish to make it interesting" in the congregation, he embraced them all. The Irish of the Parish were described as "fighting and forgiving" and "doing reckless things and never counting the cost".

When he saw a need he met it. First a home for homeless men, which became known as "Father Dempsey's Hotel for Workingmen". It housed 400 and carried the sign "Never Closed", started in 1906. From its founding to Father Tim's death, on April 6, 1938, the hotel provided 600,000 free lodgings, and over 300,000 free meals. In 1910 he started a Day Nursery, which could accommodate 100 children of poor working women. In 1911 he established The Hotel for Working Women, which provided 150,000 free lodgings and 200,000 free meals by the time he passed on.

Recognizing a need to provide poor children with proper nutrition, and instruction to prevent T.B. and supply poor families with clothing, furniture and food, he established the White Cross Crusade. One of the most interesting aspects of this enterprise was that it was funded by the sale of old newspapers.

When the Depression deepened in 1931, he opened his Free Lunch Room, which provided 6,000,000 meals by the time of his passing. The Free Lunch Room served as many as 13,000 meals in one day; from September 1, 1932 to September 1, 1933 it served 2,500,000 and in August, 1933, 82,455 meals. In addition, this program provided 500 weekly food baskets to poor families.

In 1932, seeing a need, but acting within the social mores of the time, he established his Home for Colored Men.

All of these institutions operated without any investigation to determine need; "Let no one go hungry" was his motto. Unlike so many other church charities, there was no preaching or sermonizing. No records were kept, Father Tim simply responded to people's needs, in a way following the Biblical admonition of the right hand not knowing what the left hand was doing when performing charity.

The fact that he was a giant of a man, 6 feet 3 inches and weighing 225 lbs. surely helped him in his other noted involvement. His involvement in labor disputes began when two of his parishioners, Paddy and Mike Kane (not related), were killed by strikebreakers. A year later, when he saw a Teamster strike looming, he offered his good offices, and settled the dispute. That was in 1910. He would eventually be involved in settling 50 labor disputes, the last involving 2000 PWA workers in March, 1936.

When the Egan and Hogan gangs began killing each other in an underworld dispute, Father Tim brought together Max and Harry Greenberg, "Jellyroll" Hogan, "Dinty" Colbeck, "Chippy" Robinson, and "Steve" Ryan, and made them make peace.

Even though he usually worked in shirt sleeves and collarless, Father Tim organized a committee of 125 prominent St. Louisans to support his work. He was friend to the most desperate in society and to the powerful and wealthy, calling them to charity.

Father Tim's death on April 6, 1936 shocked the city. Archbishop, later Cardinal, Glennon said "he died because his heart was too big . . . he overworked his heart for the poor". The St. Louis Central Trades and Labor Union (Council) passed a heartfelt resolution in part stating "his tireless

efforts in furtherance of the broad general cause of human betterment endeared him to the hearts of all . . .”

The funeral Mass was held at his beloved St. Patrick's, which had recently been renovated by the Building Trade Unions, the only floral arrangement a wreath from the Trades and Labor Union. Music was provided by members of the Musicians Union. His six active pallbearers were from the Teamsters Union, Father Tim being an honorary member of Local 600, I.B.T.

Six hundred packed the church, and thousands lined the way to Calvary Cemetery. Along the way school children stood, the poor, the wealthy. As the casket "of St. Louis' most useful citizen" passed fire stations, the firefighters all stood in silent tribute. The line of march included 300 automobiles, and the Right Reverend Timothy Dempsey, Father Tim, was laid to rest in Exiles' Rest, which he had created in 1910 as a last resting place for the poor and forgotten he had served. There under a Celtic Cross he lies with 200 of those whose lives he touched.

John Cochran, Member of Congress, on April 8, 1936, concluded his remarks regarding Father Tim's passing with:

"The example set by this good man will live long in the memories of the people of St. Louis, and while we all realize it will be a most difficult task to carry on his activities, I am sure every effort will be made . . ."

"In Memoriam"

"The White House
Washington, D.C."

"Honorable Bernard F. Dickmann, Mayor of St. Louis:

"It gives me great pleasure to associate myself with those who are planning to honor the memory of Right Reverend Monsignor Timothy Dempsey next Sunday. His enlightened work in behalf of the underprivileged entitles him in death to the lasting remembrance of a world he helped to make better for those of us who live in it.

Franklin D. Roosevelt"

"Father Tim Dempsey"

From the winds of the north where the lumber jack swings,
His ax, amidst frost-bitten cedar or pine,
As far to the south as the mocking bird sings,
and languorous winds kiss magnolia and vine;
From the Bowery bread line by hunger's pinch led
To feasts that the dogs of the rich would reject,
To the Golden Gate city upbuilt from the dead,
Father Dempsey enkindles men's love and respect.

When industrial panic extended its scope,
So that many in vain sought the vanishing job,
His hotel and his home became centers of hope
To those the unthinking deride as the mob,
and when future discussion resulted in fear
No profession of faith, no conventional lies,
Were needed to waken his aid and his cheer --
For his sympathy never has ended in sighs.

When the glamor and worship of sordid success,
No longer shall dazzle the eyes of the crowd,
When solemn pretensions have ceased to impress
And fortune of each is the price of a shroud;
His service, his friendship, his kindness to all,
In memory's chamber no shadow shall dim;
and long shall his labor still live to recall
The sunshine of life, the beloved "Father Tim".

By Michael Gallaher

From the only prepared address by Father Tim,

"On the 25th Anniversary of Archbishop Kenrick as Bishop"

After thanking the Archbishop for his generous support, indicating that it spared many from going to other charities, where they would have to sing "Nearer My God to Thee", he added "when they didn't mean it" or "Land of the Pilgrim's Pride", when they didn't mean that either."

For members of an organization dedicated to Christian Charity no better example can be found than Father Tim, and for a Division no better namesake.