



Fr. James Francis Burke, C.S.Sp.
(6 April 1926 - 5 May 2008)

Written by: Fr. Tom Byrne, C.S.Sp.

The smiling eyes and happy face of Jim Burke is how many of us know him and want to remember him. Born in Pittsburgh in 1926 he represented himself as a “Steelers and Pirates fan” with a decent golf score. He boasted of his working class family yet with an air of culture born of Mary and Edmund Burke’s Irish heritage. He could finesse his way into any conversation. With a down home quality, he attracted simple folks, and evoked the simplicity within you, if he sensed an unnecessary pretense. Graduating from St. Laurence O’Toole and Central Catholic he entered Cornwells Heights in 1943 and continued in course to his Profession at Ridgefield in 1947 and ordination at Ferndale in 1953. Writing Father General for permission to make perpetual vows he said: “This is not a hasty choice or quick decision but a long cherished desire.”

Missioned to East Africa until 1959, he labored with much joy among the Maasai peoples, regaling us with memories and some “tall tales” of that rugged life. Unexpected bursts of laughter peppered his narratives, especially if his audience included confreres who knew of what he spoke. Jim enjoyed being a priest wherever he was sent, and the faithful recall his days in New Orleans, LA, Plantersville, TX, and especially of Immaculate Heart in Lake Charles, LA. After 11 ½ years there he wrote “it breaks my heart to leave you where I have been loved and coddled.”

Obedient in the final analysis, he nonetheless is on record from his earliest days as having an independent streak; serious differences of opinion were not hidden from view. Helping young men to discern their vocations in religious life, and directing them in formation programs of our Province, Jim was always thoughtful and articulate. He was not afraid of change, or of personal challenges to grow, even asking for a periodic opportunity to renew and study. He earned a Master of Divinity later in life and became a careful student of Holy Scriptures. His breviary was a daily companion.

He died on May 5th at 82 years of age. About death he wrote “it prepares us for a new birth. I am always willing to find out how to start over again.”

You will be missed, Jim Burke.... Hasta Luego!