

Fr. James Patrick O'REILLY 77 PR USA
* August 7, 1916 Waterbury, CT

+ July 11, 1994 Hemet, CA

A brother of Fr. Francis X. O'Reilly, he attended Cornwells and made his vows at Ridgefield on August 25, 1937. In the final year of his senior studies at Ferndale, he was ordained there on June 19, 1942.

The following year he went to Puerto Rico, where he worked for five years in the parish of Toa Alta.

In 1948 we find him at Bakersfield, CA, to help staff the Our Lady of Guadeloupe Parish as assistant pastor. His fluency in Spanish stood him there in good stead and he gave himself unstintingly for fourteen years.

In 1962 he was transferred to St. Peter Claver's Church, Oklahoma, OK. Two years later, however, the U.S.A. west of the Mississippi became a fully autonomous Spiritan circumscription and he was sent to Glenwood Springs, CO, as bursar and then director of its newly established formation center. Subsequently, he served as director of the other formation houses at Denver and Houston, TX.

Returning to pastoral ministry in 1973, he spent one year as associate pastor at St. John's, Tucson, AZ, before being asked to become pastor of St. Anthony's Church in the Casa Blanca area of Riverside, CA. He had barely reached the place when the city informed him that the church building had been condemned as unsafe and could no longer be used.

Undaunted, he converted a nearby hotel into a temporary church and had plans drawn up for a new church building. When the people wondered where the money would come from, he simply answered, "Do God's work and he will help." And the church was finished in 1976. For sixteen years he labored very zealously in that area among poor people. When his term came to an end, he received two eloquent testimonials. One from Bp. Philip Straling, who wrote, Fr. O'Reilly "was a great priest and missionary in Casa Blanca." That place had been plagued with

serious social problems, such as gangs, shootings and murders, but Father was "recognized by all in the community as a stabilizing factor." Vic Jones, Chief of Police in Riverside amplified, "what we are seeing now gives new hope for those people in Casa Blanca who have lived in absolute fear for so long...A show of community solidarity (was called for, but it needed) a central figure to hold this force together....It could not come from the police. It had to be someone the people trusted. You were the one. Your courage and leadership has brought us out of troubled times....Thank you for all you have done."

His final appointment came in 1981 as pastor to Our Lady of Guadeloupe, Bakersfield, CA. Two years later he entered the Congregation's retirement home in Hemet, CA. He could still celebrate his golden jubilee as a priest there in 1992. Among the many congratulations he received on that occasion was one from President George Bush. He died two years later. Interment took place at the local Spiritan community cemetery.

A congenial and hospitable confrere with a perpetual smile on his lips, he was highly regarded by all whose lives he touched.