

WALSH, M. Rev. James E.

Born: Apr. 30th, 1891

Died: Jul. 29th, 1981

Buried: Maryknoll, NY

Biography provided by Maryknoll Intl. on July 29th 2000

James E Walsh was the second of nine children, to Mary Concannon and William E. Walsh, in Cumberland, MD on April 30th, 1891. James Edward's humor and writing ability developed early. His father sent him off to parochial school when he and his brother bedeviled their teacher by "reciting our lessons standing on our heads." After being graduated from Mt. St. Mary's College at age 19, James worked two years as timekeeper in a steel mill where "the world as a sort of fairyland came to something like its true light... Finally, I found that when I surrendered myself to the thought of the priesthood a sort of holy joy filled my soul." Both his mother and father were overjoyed at his decision to be a missionary priest. "As soon as I read the title 'American Catholic Foreign Mission Seminary' I felt at once that this was what I had been waiting for."

James entered the first class of Maryknoll in 1912 and on December 7th, 1915 became the second priest ordained in the society. Three years later he was assigned to China. That first remarkable mission group consisted of Fathers Frederick Price, Francis X. Ford, Bernard Meyer and James Walsh. They departed for Kwong Tung, China on September 8th, 1918. A year later, after the death of Fr. Price, Fr. Walsh became the Superior of the Maryknoll Mission in China. Pope Pius XI named Father Walsh, at age 36, as the first bishop of the Vicariate of Kongmoon. The missionary, to whom the Chinese Catholics gave the name of Wha Lee Son (Pillar of Truth), was ordained Shepherd of the Church on May 22nd, 1927, on Sancian Island, the death place of St. Francis Xavier. "The task of a missionary," Bishop Walsh said at the time, "is to go to a place where he is not wanted, but needed, and to remain until he is not needed but wanted. Of his new role as Bishop, he said to his missionaries: "I am the least among you. Look upon me as your servant. I am made Bishop chiefly to help you. If my help takes the form of direction, I hope you will realize it is intended to help just the same. But I think we understand each other; we are a happy family."

Bishop Walsh returned to Maryknoll, N.Y. in 1936, following the death of Bishop James Anthony Walsh. In April of that year, he was elected the second Superior General of Maryknoll. During his ten-year term, he supervised Maryknoll's first mission efforts to Latin America and Africa. At the Vatican's request after his term of office, Bishop Walsh returned to China in 1948 as head of the Catholic Central Bureau in Shanghai to coordinate the Church's missionary efforts throughout the country.

When the communists came to power in 1949, all foreign clergy were harassed and pressured to leave. The government ordered Bishop Walsh's Bureau closed in 1951. When Maryknoll superiors expressed concern for his safety, Bishop Walsh betrayed a trace of his Irish temper: "To put up with a little inconvenience at my age is nothing. Besides, I am a little sick and tired of being pushed around on account of my religion." He was arrested October 18th, 1959, and sentenced to 20 years in prison. During those years in jail, he received no news reports and only one non-Chinese visitor. His brother, the late William C. Walsh, former Maryland State Attorney General, was allowed to visit him in 1960. Without advance notice, he was freed from Shanghai's prison hospital after

-serving almost 12 years of his sentence. Clad in rumpled khaki trousers and a faded checkered shirt, he walked across Hong Kong's Lo Wu Bridge to freedom on July 10th, 1970.

On his return to the states, Bishop Walsh stopped in Rome where he was received in an emotional audience by Pope Paul VI. The Pontiff told the veteran missionary: "You have been a witness, authentic and simple, in joy and in sorrow, then in suffering and humiliation and finally in separation from the people you loved so much. For all of this, We thank you on behalf of the entire Church of Christ."

A prolific writer, Bishop Walsh wrote six books, including the popular "Man on Joss Stick Alley", and a score of articles on mission life and work. His touching "clodhopper" story "Shine On Farmer Boy" appeared in the July 1980 issue of the Maryknoll's magazine. Perhaps, more than any other writing, the latter not only sums up the life of Bishop Walsh whose motto in China was "Suffer the little children to come unto me", but best expresses the deep, abiding vocation of Maryknoll:

"I choose you, sang in my heart as I looked at my awkward farmer boy, perfect picture of the under-privileged soul...the overlooked and the overworked, the forgotten and despised...Shine on, farmer boy, symbol to me of the thousand million like you who drew the Son of God from heaven to smooth and bless your weary anxieties and puzzles brows. I choose you and dedicate myself to you and ask no other privilege but to devote the energies of my soul to such as you...Shine on, farmer boy!"

Above all, Bishop Walsh was the dedicated missionary, deep of faith, full of humor, independent of manner. Perhaps he will be remembered, mostly by others, as the Bishop who spent twelve years in a Chinese prison. He will, however be remembered more by Maryknollers as the Bishop who never uttered an unkind word about his captors. "The highest dream that can stir the heart of man is to squander it in the Charity of Christ for the souls of brother men."

Maryknoll's beloved Bishop James E. Walsh died peacefully at Maryknoll, New York on July 29th, 1981. Fr. Tom Kirchmyer was with him when he died. Never fully recovered from prostate surgery in June 1981, Bishop Walsh failed rapidly during his last ten days. Although the cause of death was listed as arterioscleratic heart failure, Maryknollers pray that his great heart beats with us still. Completing sixty-six years as a priest and fifty-four as a bishop, he celebrated his ninetieth birthday on April 30th, 1981. Since his release from the Shanghai prison in 1970, Bishop Walsh resided at the main seminary. His days were quiet and orderly with his prayers and Mass, his readings and frequent strolls. The evening of his life was one of personal dignity: the priest, the gentleman, a bother to no one, an inspiration to all.

On Monday Aug 3rd, 1981 a funeral mass was celebrated in St. Patrick's Cathedral with H. E. Terence Cardinal Cooke as principal Celebrant and Msgr. William McCormack, National Director of the Society of the Propagation of the Faith, as Homilist. Vespers and wake service were conducted that evening by Fr. Robert Sheridan at Maryknoll. On Tuesday Aug 4th, 1981 Cardinal Cooke again celebrated and Fr. James Noonan was Homilist at Maryknoll's funeral Mass. Bro Justin Joyce read his biography. Fr. Winslow led graveside service in the Maryknoll Cemetery.

Bishop Walsh was survived by four sisters; Mrs. F. L. Werner, 412 Magruder St., Cumberland MD 21502; Miss Mary G. Walsh, same address; Sr. Joseph, SSND Villa

Maria, Glen Arm MD; and Sr. M. Rosalia, MSHH, 1001 W. Joppa Rd., Baltimore MD as well as several nieces and nephews. Bishop Walsh had three deceased brothers: Fr. John F. Walsh MM; Hon. William C. Walsh; W. N. Walsh; and one deceased sister Margaret Walsh.