

FR TOM'S KINDNESS LIVES ON

Thomas Erwin Horgan was born on August 8 1915 at Mintaro in the mid north of SA and moved to Adelaide in 1918 with his family. Tom attended the Dominican school at Glenelg and later boarded at Rostrevor College.

In 1934 he commenced his studies for the priesthood at Corpus Christi College, Werribee, Victoria and then at Propaganda College in Rome.

Thomas was ordained to the priesthood for the Archdiocese of Adelaide on July 27, 1941, the day on which the foundation stone for St. Francis Xavier Seminary at Rostrevor was laid. From 1947 to 1951 Fr Tom was to hold the position of philosophy lecturer at the seminary.

Apart from his two years at Mt Gambier (1945-46) and his time at Victor Harbor (1981-87) his priestly ministry was centred in Adelaide.

To list the parishes in which Fr Tom served as assistant or parish priest, Adelaide, Mt Gambier, Colonel Light Gardens, St. Mary's, Thebarton, Victor Harbor, Glenelg, Semaphore is to tell only a small part of the story.

His avocations included nine years as Vicar General, membership of the Senate (later Council) of Priests, Diocesan Consultor, Army Chaplain rising to the post of Senior Chaplain and several other diocesan committees and responsibilities. His fluency in the Italian language meant that he was often called upon to minister to those for whom Italian was the mother tongue.

From his family he had inherited a love of music and had a fine singing voice.

Fr Tom was 20 years ordained when the Second Vatican Council burst upon an unsuspecting Church. With his usual aplomb he accepted and implemented the changes to ministry that were the fruit of the Council.

When appointed Vicar General in March 1975 he assumed the title of Monsignor, a title he wore lightly. He disliked being addressed as Mons. He said it made him feel like a World War I battle. It was as Vicar General that he was more than ever solicitous for his fellow priests, who were grateful for his care and concern. It is fitting that part of his estate was specifically earmarked for the care of retired priests.

The thousands of people whose lives he touched in all these areas of ministry remember him as a gentle, dedicated and compassionate priest who was there for them at times of illness and mourning as well as the joyful celebrations of baptisms, first communions and marriages. The centrality of the Eucharist in his daily life was clear to all.

He was also esteemed as a raconteur par excellence and a man of very dry wit. As a devotee of P. G. Wodehouse and the world of Jeeves, his eloquent use of the English language was unconsciously Wodehousean in its style. Indeed his stories were peppered with whimsical characters of the ilk of Wodehouse's Bertie Wooster and his companions.

As a result of his student days at Propaganda College in Rome he had priest friends across Australia and on other continents. Until the end of his days a simple incident in daily life would trigger

in Fr Tom's memory a tale of Biffy Gilhooley (or some other character with an equally improbable name) who had been part of his journey and who had earned his place in history through a witticism, faux pas or malapropism. Like the householder of the scriptures he would constantly bring forth from the storehouse of his memory treasures old and new.

Many of Fr Tom's yarns or remarks were self-deprecatory. Not long before his death, while being assisted by two Sisters to negotiate some stairs he remarked wryly, "One would never suppose that I once played centre-half-back for the Rostrevor College First XVIII."

In 2001 when some of the priests of the Adelaide Archdiocese gathered at Sevenhill for a retreat, it was arranged that we would venture to Mintaro for Mass. It was at Mintaro that the Horgans had worshipped for many years and where Tom had been baptized in 1915.

The Mass was one of thanksgiving for the blessings given to the Horgan clan.

Though he officially retired in August 1990 he continued his pastoral ministry in the Glenelg parish where he lived until his death.

Mgr Tom Horgan died peacefully at home in Glenelg on March 18 2002 and his Requiem Mass was celebrated in St Francis Xavier's Cathedral.

Taken from a biography compiled by priests of the Archdiocese.

- To find out more about leaving a bequest to the Archdiocese and the Bishop Murphy Society, contact Jane Juniper on 8210 822 or jjuniper@adelaide.catholic.org.au