

## Fr. Thomas Rice C.M.

Fr Thomas Rice was born in Auchinstarry on the 23rd April 1907 son of Patrick Rice originally from Benagh County Louth and Elizabeth Dale originally from Annaboe County Armagh. The family home was originally in Auchinstarry and then in Cronulla Place Kilsyth. Fr Rice was a brother to Catherine, Mary, John Francis, Patrick Terrence, Michael, Elizabeth, James and adopted brother of Anthony.

After being educated at St Patrick's Kilsyth and St Aloysius College Glasgow, he began work as a grocery assistant. After a Mission in St Patrick's Kilsyth by the Vincentian Fathers, Thomas contacted the Lanark Superior of the Vincentian Order to enquire about becoming a priest.

He was trained for the priesthood by the Vincentian Fathers at Armagh, at Liverpool and then finally at St Joseph's Seminary Blackrock, Dublin. He was ordained a Priest on 10th June 1933 in the Metropolitan Pro Cathedral of St Mary in Great Malboro Street, Dublin. After a short visit home to Kilsyth to visit his family and despite being a Scot, he was issued with an Irish passport and dispatched on missionary duty to China. He arrived in Shanghai on 18th Dec 1933 and travelled onwards to serve in the Parish of St Joseph's Cathedral in Tung Tang, Peking (Beijing). St Joseph's had an associated school called St Patrick's and also one other small parish outside the city. The priests of the mission also had various other Chaplaincy duties.

The Chinese name for Father Rice was "*Li Te-K'li*".

One locally remembered story in Kilsyth which does not feature in the official history of the Vincentian fathers, is that whilst there, Fr Rice was arrested for being a Christian Missionary by the Chinese Communist Revolutionary Forces headed by Mao Tse Tung in 1948. As a result, he was sentenced to death by firing squad but due to the fact that he had a Republic of Ireland passport and was not '*British*' his sentence was commuted to house arrest. After serving out the rest of his sentence he was released, and he eventually escaped to the West in 1949.





**St Joseph's College, Blackrock, Dublin  
once a Seminary College, now a school.**



**St Mary's Pro Cathedral Dublin**

The other priests involved in the Peking Mission were;

Fr Maurice Kavanagh - Vincentian Superior.

Fr. Michael Crowley – was the second last to leave the mission after the communist revolution.

Fr. Michael Howard

Fr. Kevin Murnaghan

Fr. James Feely

Fr. Thomas Rice

Fr. Andrew Kavanagh - brother of Fr Maurice Kavanagh

Fr. Sylvestre Ma

Fr. James Milner who died on the mission having suffered a fatal seizure after swimming in 1939.

(See photos of some of these priests below)

Fr. Maurice Kavanagh (superior) was arrested 27/08/1951 and charged with crimes against the state. He was imprisoned, tortured and then released 06/09/1952 - more than a year in custody. After this date Fr Kavanagh arranged for all his remaining curates to leave China due to the growing threat from the Communists. Each of the priests left by various different routes and by using a variety of safe houses, they escaped the country without further arrest and torture.

Fr Rice together with Fr Feely had already left the country by this time. In late 1948 they took a route from Peking south east to the port of Tientsin where they were evacuated on a refugee ship with mostly English and American evacuees. The ship sailed to Hong Kong where it arrived on 7th December 1948. During their time in Hong Kong the two priests were taken care of by the Maryknoll Missionary Society. Although he was very fragile after his ordeal Fr Rice left hospital soon after his arrival in Hong Kong but Fr Feely remained in hospital for some time to recover from his ordeal.



**Fr Maurice Kavanagh - Superior**



**Fr. James Feely**

Fr Rice departed from Hong Kong on the 4th January 1949 onboard the US cargo ship "*General M C Meigs*" and he arrived in San Francisco on 24th of January 1949 - again being cared for by the Maryknoll Mission. On return to Ireland from the USA he was allowed to go home to his parents' home in Kilsyth to recuperate from the ordeal, during which he had to be spoon fed like a baby as his stomach was not yet prepared to digest different foods from the staple diet of rice which he had endured for so long.

Fr Kavanagh, we understand, also eventually made it back home safely to Ireland but much later in 1952.

Fr Rice remained a Vincentian Father throughout his ordeal and returned to his Priestly duties in Scotland and elsewhere where he was an occasional visitor to Kilsyth and Croy. He can be seen in the photograph below leading the Corpus Christi Procession (holding the monstrance between Fr Brennan and Fr Anthony) in Croy in June 1949 shortly after his repatriation.

There were fears expressed by his family that he was not strong enough to participate in this Corpus Christi celebration as it involved being on his feet for so long - just months after his return in a much weakened state, however these proved to be unfounded and he was able to carry out his duties without assistance.



**St Joseph's Cathedral Peking (Beijing)**  
founded in 1653. Photo © Paul Battley 1999 reproduced with thanks.



**St Vincent's Sheffield**

After a period of some months convalescence at home in Kilsyth, Fr Rice was then sent to St Vincent's Parish in Sheffield, England where he was able to continue his duties as a priest. After many years in St Vincent's, Fr Rice was transferred to the Parish of St Mary's in Lanark, during which time he also undertook chaplaincy duties at Smylum Home and Orphanage.

Fr. Thomas Rice died in the Western Infirmary Edinburgh on 27th February 1969 from heart failure and is buried in the cemetery at Lanark in the area reserved for Priests and Religious.

*Our thanks to his nephew George Dailly for this information and also to Fr Thomas Davitt CM archivist of the Irish Province of the Vincentian Fathers.*

## **Social and presentation to young priest.**

On Sunday evening in St Patrick's School Kilsyth a social and welcome home was held for a former member of St Patrick's congregation who was recently ordained to the priesthood. The guest of the evening was Rev Thomas Rice. The school was filled to overflowing. Very Reverend Canon Macnamara and was supported on the platform by Rev Fr Harold formerly of Kilsyth. Reverend Fathers Murray and O'Brien, Croy; Father Byrne, Larbert; Father Docherty, Crosshill, Glasgow; Messrs William McElhaney, James Docherty and Pat Holland.

After tea had been partaken of, the Very Rev Chairman in the course of his remarks said that Father Rice must feel a very happy man this evening at the way the people turned out to welcome him home. It was a great tribute to Father Rice and his parents that he had attained to the position of a member of the great order of the Vincentians. He congratulated him and said that he would be an exemplary priest and an honour to the Church.

Mr Pat Holland in the course of the evening said that about 10 years ago a boy left this Parish to go to St Patrick's, Armagh to study for the priesthood. The boy, the first male help of a working-class family, after leaving school had started to work as an assistant in the grocery trade. A Mission came to St Patrick's Kilsyth conducted by the Vincentian Fathers and one of the priests giving the Mission was Superior of the house of Lanark. That boy, who had a yearning for the priesthood, got in touch with the Superior, with the result that arrangements were completed for starting study with the objective in view and sometime afterwards he crossed to Ireland. He studied to be a priest at Armagh, then Liverpool and finished up his task as a pupil at Blackrock College Dublin. On 16th June last he was duly ordained a priest at the Marlboro Street, Pro-Cathedral Dublin (*St Mary's - Ed*). That boy who left here ten years ago is now a man and was their guest this evening in the person of the Reverend Thomas Rice C.M. He needed no introduction – a priest never does to a Catholic audience! Those of them who did not know him, would know his people well enough and knowing them they would admit the son is worthy of the parents and the parents worthy of the son. He would like to include the grandmother also, who he was pleased to see present that evening. It was not everyone who had the vocation for the priesthood, for they are born, not made. It was a life of prayer, restraint, hard work and often disappointment, with no thanks.

Father Rice had taken three vows – chastity, obedience and poverty. He must go where he is sent without question be it China or Peru. He could not own anything except the clothes he wears. Money meant nothing to him. To the average man it seemed a hard life, but to the priest of the Catholic Church it was a happy life. What better life could any young catholic man aspire to? They were away from the world and all its shibboleths. They had only one objective in life and that was to save souls. Father Rice had been successful in aspiring to this. He had studied hard, worked patiently, denied himself to his own family and now he was a member of the noble Order that has done so much for mankind in general.

It was unnecessary for him to tell Father Rice that they in Kilsyth were happy for his elevation to the priesthood. He would not say they were proud – for that was a worldly word but they were very happy and rejoiced with him that he had obtained his chief objective in life and that was to be a Vincentian Father and work for the Glory of God. They were met that evening to give him a welcome to his home town and rejoice with him in the office he had attained. He was asked on behalf of the Catholics of Kilsyth to ask Father Rice humbly to accept this breviary as a present from them – a book that will be in daily use by him in discharge of his sacred office – and at the same time they hoped that when he was turning over the leaves he would sometimes remember them in his prayers as he could assure him that they would remember him in theirs. They knew that he would not value it by its intrinsic worth but by the good wishes that accompany it. They wished him every success in the missionary fields and that with God's help they prayed that his labours may be fruitful and that he would reap a plenteous harvest.

Fr Rice in reply said that it was very hard for a young man to speak before a crowd. He had practiced it in college, but this was the first time in public and before the people that knew him too! They must try and appreciate the words his heart would like to utter but he was unable to give voice to his feelings. They had heard about his good points but nothing about his bad ones! He was no better than any of the other lads he used to keep company with and he hoped to God he was no worse! He appreciated what very much the people had done and

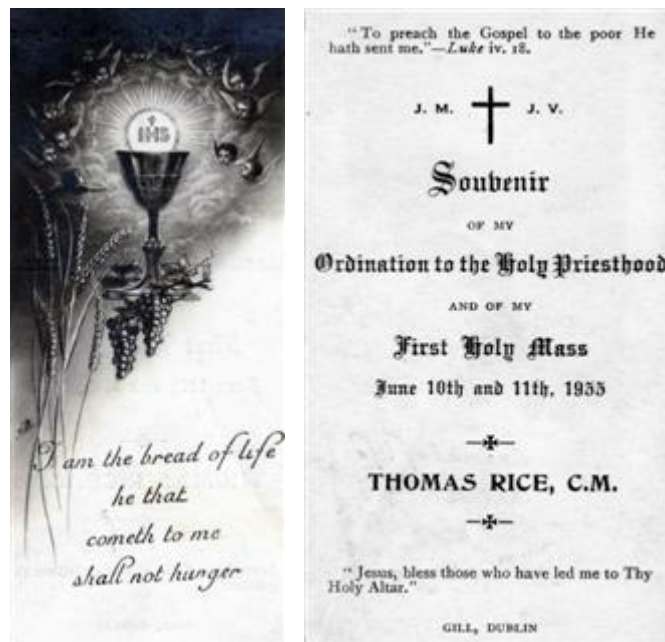
the welcome he had received. He was glad to be back in Kilsyth amongst them again. He knew every stone in the streets and every blade of grass in the district and had often longed to see them. It was a hard task to go through and at times he had felt down-hearted, but the prayers of the people here came to his assistance and helped him onwards. He referred to the sacrifice his father and mother had made in allowing him to go forward to the priesthood. His life was not such a hard one; He had no worries about money as he got his meat and clothes provided. If he was in sorrow or in doubt, he had always someone to confide in, not like some of the regular clergy who were situated in a lonely parish with no one to speak to. He could not reply to all the nice things said about him that evening, but he appreciated them very much. He could assure them that the people of Kilsyth would always be very much in his prayers.

Others who spoke in terms of eulogy of Father Rice were Fathers Harold, Murray, Docherty and O'Brien.

A vote of thanks was moved by Mr William McIlhaney. Songs were given by Mrs Carberry, Miss Alice Kelly, Miss M. McAteer and Messrs Pat Connolly and James Kelly and an accordion selection by Mr H Dempsey. The proceedings closed with the singing of the hymn '*Faith of our Fathers.*'

**The Kilsyth Chronicle Friday 14th July 1933 - reproduced by kind permission.**

Fr. Rice's Ordination Card





Fr Rice Dublin 1932



Fr Rice in Dublin



Corpus Christi Procession  
at Croy June 1949 Fr Rice, Fr  
Brennan and Canon Downey



Corpus Christi Procession  
at Croy June 1949 Canon  
Downey, Fr Brennan & Fr Rice



Fr Rice is Ordained at Blackrock Dublin  
10th June 1933



Fr Rice - the blessing received from a new priest  
Dublin 10th June 1933



Fr Rice and his eldest sister  
Mrs Catherine Dailly





LORD, we pray Thee grant that the soul of the priest, Thy servant, THOMAS whom during his earthly sojourn Thou didst honour with sacred office, may evermore find joy in the glories of heaven Through our Lord, Jesus Christ, Thy Son, who lives and reigns with You in the Unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

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Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon him. May he rest in peace. Amen.

Fr Rice Prayer Card



Fr Rice as a young boy, before taking up his studies



Fr Rice's Headstone at Lanark



Fr Rice's Chinese ID Card Outside



Fr Rice's Chinese ID Card Inside

