

Lives Remembered

'The healing priest' who touched a Tyrone village

Horse Brad celeb stuff

FR PETER ROOKEY

It was in Benburb, Co Tyrone that Fr Peter Mary Rookey first became known as "the healing priest".

He had arrived in 1948, one of seven Servites sent to establish the order in Ireland, making their home in an old manor house used as a hospital during the Second World War.

After a quiet first year, word began to spread that miracles were happening when a young American priest prayed.

Soon people were descending on the sleepy village in their hundreds and healing services had to be moved from the small chapel to be staged outside.

Over the next 60 years, as Fr Rookey travelled the world with the order, people flocked to him wherever he went to seek his blessing. In later years, having found his own healing ministry, he would spend the entire day on the telephone in a simple office answering requests for prayers.

Several books recorded in detail the many miracles he is said to have carried out, from cures of cancer and other physical conditions to exorcisms and spiritual renewals.

Asked about his 'gift', Fr Rookey would say: "It is God's work, not mine - He does all the healing, I just pray."

His funeral this week heard him described as "a bridge to Christ" who "practised virtue at a heroic level" during a life immersed in prayer.

Fr Rookey would tell how he himself benefited from a "miracle" growing up in the city of Superior in Wisconsin



in the 1920s. He was just eight years old when a firework he was trying to light for July 4 exploded in his face. Doctors said he would never see again. However, his mother Johanna McGarry Rookey refused to accept the news and led her family of 13 in the Rosary after dinner each evening "until little Peter's eyesight returns". After around a year he began to recover his sight. "My healing was gradual and was all due to faith and prayer," he said. Having pledged that if he could ever see again he would become a priest, Peter was just 13 when he entered the Order of Servants of Mary (Servite) seminary at Hillside, 500 miles from his family. Ordained in 1941, he had postings in Wisconsin and Oregon before spending five

years in Benburb, three of them as prior of the small community overlooking the Blackwater river. The Irish American priest left when he was elected assistant general of the Servite order in Rome, the cue for a period of extensive travel across Europe, Africa and the Middle East. He returned to the United States in 1968 and was eventually sent back to the place of his ordination, the Basilica of Our Lady of Sorrows in Chicago. All the time Fr Rookey continued to accept invitations to speak at churches and hold healing services, where he would lead people in his "Miracle Prayer". Thousands would queue to be blessed with his crucifix containing the relics of St Peregrine (the 'cancer

saint') and the founders of the Servite order, and he led many pilgrimages to Medjugorje and the Holy Land. He also returned regularly to Benburb. In 1987 he decided to concentrate his energies on healing by founding the International Compassion Ministry (ICM) in Chicago. Extra staff had to be employed as its phone lines became jammed with requests for prayers from people around the world. When not on the phone, colleagues said Fr Peter would spend his day praying the Rosary and fasting. Having taken a vow of poverty, he led a spartan existence, but was always known for his warm sense of humour - the late comedian Bob Hope was a friend. Brother Michael Callary, provincial secretary of the Servites in the US, said he heard many people talk about how they prayed with him and were healed of their infirmities.

"He was a very holy priest, very kind to people and he would tell jokes. He had an excellent way with people," he said.

The oldest friar in the Order of Servants of Mary, Fr Peter Mary Rookey died just short of his 98th birthday on September 10 at Our Lady of Sorrows Monastery, Chicago. He had been a priest for 73 years.

Thousands of people attended his wake and funeral, which heard him described by Fr David Simonetti as a "man of prayer" who never wanted anything for himself. A month's mind remembrance Mass is expected to be held in Benburb in the coming weeks.

OLIVER BRADY

HORSE trainer Oliver Brady's celebrated winners were the stuff of legend. Starting with a rousing speech and often a sing-song, crowd roar with delight off his shirt and the jersey of his Ben Monaghan football. The flamboyant and tireless charity fundraiser died on Tuesday, almost after being first diagnosed with cancer. Given just six months in 2003 when a cyst of a golf ball was his stomach, he also underwent a heart bypass but hugely active figure diet of up to 30 to Brady, who left London and the built his house at Ballybay after re Cheltenham in 19 IR£100,000 in win He became one of

Portstewart-born artist's