



Father Keefe

Hahn

By Thomas Keefe, M.M.

Parish life in East Africa

In East Africa parish life and work is: rain on a metal roof, a mission compound, cooks and houseboys (women domestics are the exception in rectories), windstorms, flooded rivers, muddy roads—often impassable, Legion of Mary meetings, balky carburetors and flat tires, walking miles for a gallon of petrol, kerosene lamps, all night drums, big feasts like Christmas and Easter, catechumens staying at the mission just before baptism, rosary in the homes of the people, visitors from the neighboring mission. Most of all, it's the people.

Parish life is the closeness you feel to families with whom you have very deep, very real, very lasting friendships so that you no longer feel like a foreigner and outsider, friendships which in the first days you never dreamed possible.

Parish work is experiencing life as the people live it and quickly learning that they have plenty of sensible insights to happy and peaceful living. It is talking to people about things like cotton and corn and mud and rain and sun—and talking about them for hours.

Parish life is entering into the problems of all you meet, from the youngest to the oldest, from morning till evening, teaching them things you yourself may not believe with as much faith as you would wish—like trusting in a good God who will give us all we need, or being kind and helpful to *all* our neighbors, or being happy even while living with the reality of having very little.

Parish ministry is developing a touch to make people sense your sincerity, having a manner and presence that makes the people feel that the Church you represent understands them.

Parish life is holding a tiny African baby and realizing that this child who instinctively cries at danger is resting quietly in your arms.

Parish life is the joyful reaction of small children proud because you greeted them by name. It is talking to the youngsters about what happened to their front teeth, the names of their cows, their toys ingeniously constructed from whatever is handy.

Parish life is certainly joy and laughter, which is the absolute condition of our relationship, for when we are with the people we automatically enter into their joy. And joy is Africa's great gift to the Church.

Now opening a new parish in Nairobi, Father Keefe, former rector of Maryknoll Seminary, N. Y., has served also in Tanzania and the Sudan.