

AN "AMEN" TO A LIFE WELL LIVED...

The famous humorist Will Rogers once said, "I don't make jokes I just watch the government and report the facts!" Well, as the political campaign this year heats up, it is no doubt that many of our leaders are real jokes and have little or no credibility. I often worry in these times about our young people in America today. There are very few role models for them to look up to whether that is in politics, sports, the entertainment world and sadly enough, even in religion!

Many of our so-called "Idols" have feet of clay and do not stand for anything except for themselves. In contrast to this, I want to tell you about a very fine priest that I knew who just recently passed away-Fr, Thomas J. McDonald. Fr. McDonald, ordained in 1952 was 89 years old when he died on October 2nd, the Feast of the Guardian Angels.

Now, there was little or no recognition of his passing by the news media except for a small obituary in the newspaper. Yet, his life was a life poured out in service to God and his Church. Father served in several parish assignments here in the Archdiocese of New York as well as being Hospital Chaplain at St. Francis Hospital in Poughkeepsie, New York.

It was in Poughkeepsie that I got to know Fr. McDonald for I was assigned to St. Mary's Church in that very city. It was a really difficult assignment for me personally. But Fr. McDonald befriended me. He said, "Every week we'll go out to dinner as long as you're here!" Well, it was only a year that I was there. But he was unfailingly kind to me and listened to all my complaints! Young curates often have a lot of complaints.

He was a great "Spiritual Athlete" because he prayed a lot. But he was also a physical athlete because Father ran every day and completed three New York City marathons. He encouraged me to keep physically fit and to run a couple of miles, which I still try to do. I had lost touch with Fr. McDonald these last few years and found out just by accident that he had passed away and decided last Thursday evening to attend the wake which was held at the Flower Funeral Home located in Yonkers, New York.

When I entered the funeral home to pay my respects to this good priest, I saw that the whole funeral chapel was filled with firemen. Fr. McDonald had been the Chaplain for the Yonkers Fire Department for several years and was very well loved.

Many of the firefighters spoke about his goodness and dedication to people. One fireman said that Father had paid the expenses for an operation for a child out of his own pocket. Another said that the priest had accompanied him in the middle of the night to a fire and had spent several hours consoling distraught people. Yet another man spoke about what a great priest he was, always present and visible to his people.

As I listened to all these wonderful tributes from the firefighters, I felt better about myself as a priest and man. Yes, one person can make a difference in the world-either for good or evil.

Fr. McDonald was a great role model and we hope and pray that there will be more like him in the future; men and women who seek "To serve and not to be served." The choice is always ours. To use Fr. McDonald's favorite expression: "Can I hear an amen!"

Sincerely in Christ,