

## THE JOVELLANOS THAT WAS TONDO

April 30, 1972 marks the death of Msgr. Jose N. Jovellanos at the age of 84, at the orphanage of the Hospicio de San Jose.

Msgr. Jovellanos was parish priest of Tondo for fifty years. He served the Tondeños through war and peace. "During the Japanese Occupation, when the whole national structure lost its bearing and public morale was shattered by confusion and struggle for survival, Monsignor Jovellanos maintained his composure and went about his parochial chores with the calmness and consistency of one whose faith in God and love for his people cannot be shaken by the reverse of the times. He held on for as long as he could to the Tondo Church, keeping his flock together within its fold. When the Japanese Army finally commandeered the church desecrating the holy place and depriving the Tondeños of their house of worship, Monsignor Jovellanos carried on his ministry even if it took him the pains of collecting his people in other places. He saved all he could of the sacred objects of the church including the famous image of the **Santo Niño**, risking his own life in the process when the church was burned down in the Japanese Army's last effort to delay the liberation of Manila."

It was indeed hard to maintain a minister's fold in those days of destruction. But it was harder to reconstruct what has been destroyed. And this is true not only in the physical order but even more so in the spiritual and moral order.

During the war, the people of Tondo "... saw too much murders and massacres and all forms of human indignities perpetrated by the Japanese forces with the Tondeños at the groaning end. The instinct of self-preservation got the better part of the Tondeños and not uncommonly did they cast aside conventions and even self-respect, in the struggle for survival. The attitude was imbedded in their moral fiber, carried over to the post-war period, picked up by the emerging generations and finally became an institution."

It was from the depths of this physical and moral degradation that the Right Reverend Jose N. Jovellanos had to redeem his people. And for this end, the monsignor harnessed all his and his people's potentialities. "Every need of Tondo parishioners, spiritual and material, was assigned lay organizations or clubs which in their little and humble ways attended to these needs within the limits of their time and facilities." The St. Joseph Patronage of the Sick was established under the encouraging inspiration of Msgr. Jovellanos. In 1950, the Knights of Columbus was formed. The Adoracion Nocturna Filipina, Torno de Nuestra Señora de Purificacion, organized as early as November 20, 1920, was invigorated to adapt to the needs of the people.

The social and moral conditions of the immediate post-war era brought the nationalism of the Aglipayans to the fore. The foreign influence of Protestantism even helped this nationalistic sect grow. Msgr. Jovellanos to offer his own version of patriotism, organized the first Catholic Boy Scout Troop in the Philippines, thinking that in this way he can also help the young. On July 8, 1951, the Philippine and Papal flags were blessed and erected at the main altar of the Tondo Church.

In addition, the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine was organized with the purpose of forming "leaders among the young of Tondo's society for active lay apostolate". To meet this end, study clubs were erected in the different sections of the parish. This was later instituted as a catechetical instruction group with volunteer workers from among the Belgian sisters, high school students of the Tondo Orphanage and the Instituto de Mujeres, together with a pioneer group among the more devoted parishioners. In 1925, the Tondo Religious Instruction League was established out of this instruction group.

Msgr. Jovellanos was also a patron of the Instituto de Mujeres. He is the founder of the Tondo Parochial School which is now named Holy Child Catholic School.

Having enough humility to accept his limitations, he recommended the separation of certain portions of his parish. Thus, in 1924, Gagalangin became an independent parish under the patronage of St. Joseph. In 1933, the parish of San Jose de Trozo was also erected. The Immaculate Conception Parish fol-

lowed in 1951. In 1965, Balut became the present San Rafael Parish. In 1966, the San Jose Parish of Manuguit was formed. And in 1968, St. John Bosco Parish of Barrio Magsaysay was established.

Jose N. Jovellanos was born on December 6, 1887 in Ermita. His parents were Cesario Jovellanos and Fructuosa de Guia. In 1904, he graduated from the Normal Superior de Maestros. In the same year, he entered the St. Xavier Seminary. He was ordained priest on March 15, 1913.

After short periods of pastoral work in Gapan, Antipolo, Malate, Malabon and Malolos, Padre Jose, as he was fondly called by his parishioners, was appointed parish priest of Tondo in December, 1919.

On July 15, 1934, he was invested Domestic Prelate by the late Archbishop Michael J. O'Doherty. In the same year, he was elevated to the position of Canon of the Manila Cathedral.

The monseñor celebrated his Silver Sacerdotal Jubilee on March 15, 1938.

In 1945, he was appointed Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Manila. By 1954, Rome conferred on him the title of Protonotary Apostolic by means of which he was made a "member of the judicial body of the Catholic Church which studies and makes decisions regarding ecclesiastical cases and which interprets the canon laws of the Church."

Commemorating his Golden Sacerdotal Jubilee on March, 1963, he also "saw" before he died his fiftieth year in Tondo in the year nineteen hundred and sixty nine.

● Wilfredo C. Paguio