

IN MEMORY OF FATHER RICHARD E. THURMSTON

By Ed Heck

It was my great privilege to spend time with Father Richard Thurston during the final years of his long life. When I first got to know him, he was serving in retirement as an assisting priest at All Saints', celebrating a weekly Mass, singing in the choir and assisting with administration of Holy Communion on Sundays, playing the clarinet, and studying philosophy with the goal of bridging the gap between the disciplines of philosophy and theology. Already in his late 70s, he took long walks every day and had the energy and strength of a much younger man. One Sunday at coffee hour, he suggested that I join him on his walks one day a week. I thought it was a great idea, and for several years we walked about three miles almost every Thursday or Saturday, visiting many different neighborhoods and churches from Oceanside to National City. On these walks, I heard many stories of his life, as well as his strong views on a wide variety of subjects ranging from architecture to theology. As he began to show the effects of Parkinson's disease and suffered several strokes, we limited ourselves to shorter walks near his home before adjourning to his front porch or kitchen for coffee and lively conversation. Later, as he began to lose the ability to communicate, I took him for rides to places we had visited around San Diego County. In his final years, I visited him in his home and read the weekly propers from the 1928 *Book of Common Prayer*, as well as articles and books that I thought he would find interesting.

Richard E. Thurmston was born in Chicago on July 27, 1922. He graduated from Lane Tech High before enrolling at Ripon College in Ripon, Wisconsin. The stories I heard of his early years included accounts of his musical activities, but what he loved best was telling and retelling the accounts of his bicycle-riding exploits during his teenage years. Most Saturdays in good weather, as I got the story, he would ride 100 miles or so in a day, seeing the sights of the Chicago suburbs and the towns and cities of southern Wisconsin. A student at Ripon when the United States entered World War II, he served in the U.S. Army from 1943 to 1946. He was a proud member of the 75th Infantry Division (he always wore his 75th Division baseball cap on our walks) and was involved in the Battle of the Bulge, as well as campaigns in France, Belgium, and the Netherlands. He wrote a humorous account of his favorite "war stories" with the title *How I Did Absolutely Nothing to Win the War*. Almost sixty years later, I heard all of those stories and many more besides. My favorite stories concern his post-war exploits learning to drive a jeep in Paris as part of his last army assignment as a chaplain's assistant working with Father Albert J. du Bois, who was later a well-known leader of the Anglo-Catholic movement in the Episcopal Church as executive director of the American Church Union.

After World War II, Richard returned to Ripon, married Harriette Hayes, and graduated with a B.A. degree in history in 1947. He then attended Seabury-Western Theological Seminary in Evanston, Illinois. Although he was a serious student, most of the stories I heard about his seminary years focused on his battles to be ranked as the top table tennis player in the seminary. He was ordained to the priesthood in November, 1950 in the Diocese of Fond du Lac. He served two parishes in northern Wisconsin before heading west to churches in Minnesota, Missouri (where he was a canon of the cathedral in Kansas City), and Colorado (where he also worked in a prison ministry that was the basis for many of his favorite stories). In 1969, he moved to San

Diego, where he served as rector of St. Andrew's-by-the-Sea in Pacific Beach. Back in the days when parishes in the diocese competed in softball on summer Sunday afternoons, he pitched for the St. Andrew's team and was appointed commissioner of the Episcopal Softball League.

Twice a widower, Father Thrumston eventually retired in San Diego and married Edith Johnson on November 5, 1987, in St. Mary's Chapel. For many years he was a familiar figure around the parish – always dressed in his black suit and clerical collar. He continued to attend Sunday and Tuesday Eucharists for as long as he was able. A great blessing of his final years was the ministry of Father Victor Krulak, who brought Holy Communion to his home almost every Sunday. Father Thrumston died at home on May 17, 2020, at the age of 97. He had been a priest for almost 70 years. I think it would be appropriate for us to offer this prayer in his memory:

O God, who gave to your servant, Father Richard Thrumston, by his sacerdotal office, a share in the priesthood of the apostles, grant, we implore, that he may also be one of their company forever in heaven. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.