

## When?

Occasionally we Graymoor seminarians up on the Hudson River were given a day off to visit nearby locations like West Point or Garrison. Usually we were packed into the back of an open truck. And so one morning we were transported to Ossining for an afternoon – the location of the penitentiary known as Sing Sing. So what do 25 teenagers left standing in the exhaust of a truck do? They fan out along Main Street, stroll through a park; buy a cheap lunch at a diner. Three of us decided to spend our change at the local movie theater, which advertised a British film called *Odd Man Out*, starring James Mason. There were no more than ten people in the seats.

The movie was set in Belfast. A robbery was underway with four men entering a linen factory to steal its payroll. The men were members of the “Organization” (the IRA?). The stolen money would support its insurgent activities. Well the job was bungled. Guns went off. The group leader, Johnny, was wounded and left behind. Thus began his effort, handicapped by loss of blood, to evade a police cordon around Belfast’s inner city. The “Organization” tries to find him, as does a fellow named Shell whose intent was merely to reap a reward from either the insurgents or the police.

In the film we also meet an old priest named Father Tom, who had no use for this violence that had plagued Ireland for decades. Of him the original novel says: *He was reputed to have performed miracles - a singular old man who, when he telephoned or visited Authority on behalf of the poor and wayward was accorded the respect due to princes. Because he was old and gentle? Because he belonged to God? . . . This old man, when all was said and done, was merely a being who loved his fellow men.*

Father Tom also wants to bring Johnny in but Shell finds our exhausted Johnny first and escorts him to the loft of a failed artist. The latter insists on doing his portrait. He wants to depict the soul of a dying man. Other portraits cover his walls, their features Picasso-like in disarray. They seemed to symbolize our crazy world of deadly wars; how distorted human nature had become. Indeed as Johnny – delirious - sits as a model, the portraits gather before him like an audience and among them appears the transparent image of Father Tom as if giving a lesson. *I can't hear you, Father*, he says. *What are you saying? What was it you used to tell us? About: when I was a boy? A boy?* Then after a pause he says: *Now I remember . . . 'When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child! But when I became a man, I put away childish things.'* The image of Father Tom nods affirmatively. And then Johnny rises, his eyes far reaching, and proclaims: *'And though I speak with the tongues of men and angels. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have faith so as to move mountains – and HAVE NOT CHARITY! – I am NOTHING!'* Thereupon Johnny collapses into the chair.

How thrilled I was by that scene at a mere 19 years of age. What a memorable afternoon in Ossining! The movie, of course, came to an end tragically – as life has come to an end tragically for so many in our contentious world. But its point was clear: WHEN WILL THE HUMAN RACE GROW UP? When will each of us finally recall (as Johnny did) Father Tom’s simple lesson and begin to live it? When?

**Geoff Wood**