Fr. Richard Thomas Aquinas Murphy, OP Interview

0:00:05 - Fr. Cornelius (Interviewer)

You're going to have to just hold that pretty close.

What do you remember about the early days of the province?

0:00:15 - Fr. Murphy, OP

When I came back from Europe in 1939, I was assigned to Washington, DC. And what I remember about the early days of our province, I picked up only during the summer because for the rest of the year, For five years, I was in Washington, DC.

When I came back finally to River Forest in 1944, I think it was, 43, 44, the thing that most impressed me was the intense activity of just everybody.

Why, the professors at the House of Studies were teaching just about everything on the curriculum. They were switch hitters, so to speak. They were teaching at DePaul. Rosary had opened up and Trinity and Mercy High School on the south side and DePaul, of course.

0:01:15 - Fr. Cornelius (Interviewer)

Did your brother teach at DePaul?

0:01:18 - Fr. Murphy, OP

No, my brother was at St. Catharines and St. Paul. And then he taught at Rosary. He was at Rosary for about eight years.

And I recall... taking a month or so to get acclimated to find out what these rec room conversations were all about because I didn't know the names or what was going on.

So it seems to me that we were all rather happy to have Peter O'Brien as the first provincial because he had an extraordinary mind and...

0:01:42 - Fr. Cornelius (Interviewer)
What was he like In terms of his leadership, I would say. Not so much his personality, but in terms of the leadership.

0:02:05 - Fr. Murphy, OP
Well, there is this. He appreciated, I think, as much as any provincial we ever had, the intellectual orientation of the order. And at various times, people were elected out of the House of Studies. He wouldn't let them go. He said, we have to have a decent House of Studies. And so we had an excellent faculty. Everyone there, I think, had a doctorate in something or other. And the spirit was good.

0:02:35 - Fr. Cornelius (Interviewer)
That's why it grows the way it does. You can't keep a life going without that kind of a spirit. Who was the person that most influenced you as you came out here and in the intellectual life because you were a very large part of the intellectual life in this province.

0:02:58 - Fr. Murphy, OP

Yeah.

I think Walter Farrell stands out. I was lucky enough to have him at Somerset, Ohio. And then when we moved to Washington, he came along and Father O'Brien was there too. And Walter Farrell had an absolute genius for getting things going. And when people would begin to feel a little bit nervous about the direction things were taking, he was always there. And he had such a way of relaxing people and at the same time getting them to do extraordinary jobs that they would never have done if it hadn't been for him.

0:03:48 - Fr. Cornelius (Interviewer)

A man who recognizes the business. He knew them as well as he knew himself.

0:03:49 - Fr. Murphy, OP

Oh my, he...

He got the Thomist started, and he got that Lectures for Lay Folk started, and everyone wanted to be in on it. And he himself was such an outstanding lecturer and well-respected that it was great to be in the same house with him.

0:04:08 - Fr. Cornelius (Interviewer)
I just can't imagine living with somebody like Petey and himself, just men of that kind of stature who really do call forth great things from people.

0:04:20 - Fr. Murphy, OP
Yeah. I remember going into Walter one day and he laughed. He said, it can't be that bad. And another time, I waited outside his room for about an hour. And when someone came out, I waited a minute and then knocked on the door. And he said, come in.

I said, I thought maybe you wouldn't answer. He said, I lived in a house once with a superior who wouldn't answer his door. And I made a vow. I would always say, come in.

But he was a great man. And he gave us a tremendous boost.

He started the education of sisters. I think that movement was largely his. And it's rather interesting. He died at the same age St. Thomas did. And we were all asking ourselves, why? Why now?

0:05:18 - Fr. Cornelius (Interviewer)
I remember the first, I asked that question. I read Only Son. And there was a point in the book where it says it was at this point that Father Farrell died. And I just remember reading how they had found him and everything. It's like why did he go?

0:05:32 - Fr. Murphy, OP
You know, during his studentate, he was ill most of the time. And he spent a great deal of the time in bed. He had terrible sinus problems. And so what he learned, he learned pretty much on his own. And he came really out of, like a comet, out of nowhere, because there wasn't any really great intellectual life in the Order. There was some, like Raymond Marr and Callan and McHugh. But he was outstanding. He was different. He could not only...

0:06:08 - Fr. Cornelius (Interviewer)
He changed the course of the American provinces, I think.

0:06:11 - Fr. Murphy, OP
I think he did, yeah. Yeah. So I count that a great blessing to have lived with him and to have lived with great men all through my life. You know, there was Faustin in Rome and Merkelbach. And I lived next door to Garrigou-Lagrange, who one day locked me in my room by mistake, of course. He had come in to have a letter translated into French. And as he went out of the door, he absentmindedly just did what everyone does when they go out the door.

They lock it in Rome. So I screamed, of course. And he came in. Oh, he was apologetic. And then there was Deveaux and Benoit at the École Biblique. And I met Lagrange once. That was a great day in my life.

0:07:03 - Fr. Cornelius (Interviewer)

That would be right after you got there. He died in 38.

0:07:06 - Fr. Murphy, OP
Oh, he died in 38. And I saw him. In 37, when I was leaving Rome to go to France to learn some French, and then to go on to Jerusalem.

A great man.

0:07:22 - Fr. Cornelius (Interviewer)
Given the large exodus of personnel that we've had over the past 15 years, what would your hopes for the future of the province to be? We've got to establish priorities.

What would your vision be for the future? say in 20 years? Because we're going to have to pull back in some way. What do you think we should be doing?

0:07:46 - Fr. Murphy, OP
Last winter, Cornelius, I read Reggie Coffey's American Dominicans. And it was very interesting. And way back in the early days, there was a problem whether we should be out doing missionary work or whether we should have centers of study and whatnot. I've felt in the last couple of years that we've just sort of splintered a lot, and we've fragmentized. We've gone out, and nobody wants to stay home. And as a result, and this really pains me, you pick up magazine after magazine, and you hardly ever see an OP there. But you can't do that if you're out in the marketplace all the time.

So I would hope that somehow or other we would maybe raise up another Walter Farrell and start again a sort of an intellectual renaissance.

That's my hope. I don't know what's going to happen.

I remember once Professor Albright, whom I knew also, And Parabelle, they said identically the same things, that the only way to do things is by hard work. And intellectual work is very hard. And yet, it's like the Salk vaccine. One man in a lonely laboratory can do things that are going to help a great many people.

And that's our ideal, I think. People like DeVoe, he and Walter Farrell were very much alike in that they could, they were just magnetic. They could arouse audiences to interest in intellectual things. One thing I don't like at present is the somewhat, as it appears to me, the somewhat cavalier or even contemptuous dismissal of everything that's gone before. so that if you're not maybe in the marketplace or not whatever, you're not with it. I don't think that's true. I think this is a pluralistic universe, and we have room for a lot of talent.

And I don't think we should be uncharitable about those who...

0:10:31 -Fr. Cornelius (Interviewer)
No, that's true. Except, as I have said out loud, unless we begin with the fundamental purpose for which we were founded. Number one is which?

Contemplation. Nothing is going to flow from the purpose of life. That's a personal response. Unless we live together and study and pray together and deepen our lives of contemplation, I don't see how we can write. I don't see how our intellectual life will bear fruit.

I don't see how our preaching is possible. And somehow that's got to be said again and again and again. And I think people will begin to see why the reason why Dominic founded the Order and why we survived for generation after generation if we are able to contemplate.

0:11:10 - Fr. Murphy, OP
I was very pleased when I came down here to discover in this house something rather unique, an excellent library. Credit for this has to go to Gerald Masterson, I think. We have some excellent books in this library. And we have our usual Dominican convent built with no bookshelves. And it's the same problem all over. What are we going to be, students or friars preachers on the road? It's not an easy solution that we're going to have.

0:12:04 - Fr. Cornelius (Interviewer)
Somewhere there is a middle road. That's always the way it's been. Dominic carried his book with him. It was Matthew's Gospel, and I think we somehow have got to get back to that and realize so much has been said about Matthew's Gospel. We've got to have those books as well. And John's Gospel, Luke's Gospel, all of the Scripture. Do you somehow feel that your work in Scripture has produced fruit?

0:12:34 - Fr. Murphy, OP
Yes, I'm sure it must. That Latin proverb or little saying that I've always relished, *habent fata sua libelli*. Each little book has its own destiny. And it's always a question of one man plowing, another one sowing, and somebody else reaping.

But I'm really proud to be a member of an order that's produced in Lagrange. and DeVoe and Benoit. Maybe things have gone beyond them a little bit, but they were pretty solid people.

They've left something behind them.

That takes some doing.

0:13:23 - Fr. Cornelius (Interviewer)
You yourself have also left some things behind you. You have generations that you've had.

0:13:29 - Fr. Murphy, OP
Well, this last book I'm kind of happy with.

0:13:35 - Fr. Cornelius (Interviewer)
Thank you very much.

0:13:39 - Fr. Murphy, OP
Well, thank you, Cornelius.

0:13:40 - Fr. Cornelius (Interviewer)
What they're going to do is...