

*Words of Remembrance
and Words of Thanks*



Brother James M. Kelly, C.F.X.

June 30, 1947 – Dec. 3, 2011

December 6, 2011

Cathedral of Mary Our Queen
Baltimore, Maryland

Words of Remembrance

The opening of the *Fundamental Principles*, the rule of life for the Xaverian Brothers, reads in part:

Brother,
you were created by the God of love
in God's own image and likeness,
to be a unique expression of that love . . .

While these words are addressed to each Brother, we all know that some Xaverian Brothers are more unique than others. And Bro. James Kelly – whether we knew him as Jim, Bro. James, Uncle Jim, Jimmy or one of his many nicknames (for which he was fair game since he bestowed so many on the rest of us over the years) – has certainly earned a place in our memories and hearts as one of the more unique among us.

To capture the full depth and complexity of this man and his life would go beyond the brief time of these reflections now, but I would like to touch on just a few of the things that clearly were some of the loves of his life.

Xaverian Brother

First of all, Jim loved being a Xaverian Brother. He loved our Founder, our history, our community character and our community characters. He knew names, dates and facts about our shared story that few of us could match. The day after Thanksgiving, for example, he and I spent some time together as he was taking in the prognosis that he might only have a week left. After a few quiet minutes, he brightened up a bit and mused, “Maybe a week from tomorrow, the feast of St. Francis Xavier. No Brother has died on that day since Bro. Walter Dolan at the Mount in 1966.” Only he would know that little tidbit from our history. Of course, what he didn't know he could promptly piece together when needed for a good story or lesson from the past. He gave time, energy and enthusiasm to carrying on the tradition of the great men who went before us, and he shared this passion with countless numbers of teachers and students in Xaverian schools.

But beyond our history and our story, Jim loved the Xaverian Brothers, the very real and motley band of men who follow the dream and vision of Theodore James Ryken in our world today. Even though he could at times be more than a bit irascible in his opinions (which were never unexpressed), he authentically loved this community, and we loved him back.

Communicator

Part of his unique position in the community and elsewhere was that he loved to communicate. Long before anyone dreamed of Facebook or Twitter, Jim had his own means of social media – from the land

line to the cell phone to email to Blackberry, from notes, newsletters, books and cassettes. He took to every form of connecting with people in real time and as immediately as possible. Phone conversations often began mid-sentence without the usual pleasantries. His speed dial lists and email distribution lists were innumerable.

Of course, what marked his style of communication even more than its broad scope or high speed was its “transparency,” long before that was a buzzword for personal or organizational style. His messages and meanings, qualities and quirks, were always obvious, clear and unambiguous, shared in an unvarnished and unedited way; there were no filters. More than once did many of us – and occasionally he himself – regret that there was no “are you sure?” prompt before he hit the “send” button on email.

But for him communications technology was only a means to an end -- a tool to connect with others, to relate to many different people and groups, and to maintain those relationships over time and distance.

Irishman

And, if he was a strong relater, that was in part due to his heritage, for he also loved being Irish. I recall just a few years ago getting a call from him that began, “Do you have a ten euro note?” I responded as I often did to his unannounced, mid-sentence phone calls, “Hello. This is Art. How are you?” I went on to ask why he needed euros right now, and he informed me that he was submitting an application for his Irish passport and couldn’t submit the fee with a US check. I had no idea why he suddenly wanted an Irish passport, nor was he quite sure, but it was somehow of utmost importance.

Of course, he would never need a passport to document his Irish soul. His seemingly natural abilities as a story-teller, a bestower of names and a sharp wit all flowed from the Irish blood that coursed through him. That same blood, of course, fed at times a dread that was best described in a favorite line of his from William Butler Yeats: “Being Irish, he had an abiding sense of tragedy, which sustained him through temporary periods of joy.”

Leader

As a leader in Xaverian schools for most of his professional life, it was clear that Jim also loved to be in charge. He knew all the dimensions of what that meant: control, management, setting expectations, holding people accountable, but also setting a vision, motivating, mentoring – all things he learned from his father, who was always “running things.” Jim grew up on the grounds of a large State hospital in Massachusetts, where his father was Superintendent. From those early years, he became comfortable in a large institution and saw how to run it effectively. More importantly, he also learned how to turn it into a community -- a place where people came to support, nurture and learn from one another. And he learned how to lead by his own example of tireless dedication and purpose, not just by fiat.

Teacher

Finally, as much as he enjoyed leadership, he loved being a teacher more than anything else. The classroom was where he most wanted to be – even in his final days. Seeing “old boys” was a joy, and his

greatest thrill and delight was seeing and following the lives of those who went on to become teachers themselves. But whether lecturing on his favorite prose or poetry in British literature, mentoring young teachers, correcting papers in writing or on tape, he was always teaching beyond and beneath the curriculum. He was always “handing on the faith,” which was what he taught most and best.

And we’ve all marveled at how some of his finest teaching came at the end of his life. What he taught about living and dying probably differs for each of us, so I can only speak for myself. In the end, what Jim taught me was that even a faith as strong and deep as his only comes to maturity when it develops an equally strong and deep trust.

As I accompanied him during his multi-year roller coaster ride with cancer over these past years, I was often reminded of the story told by Henri Nouwen, the noted spiritual writer. In a talk a few years before his own unexpected death, Nouwen spoke of his ministry with circus performers and his particular fascination with trapeze artists. He described how he learned about the roles and the complex relationship between the two “players” in any trapeze act:

- The “flier,” who practiced and practiced to perfect single, double and even triple somersaults in the air high above the ground and the crowd
- And the less-noticed “catcher” who waited and watched through most of the act, but whose presence and skill ultimately determined how the act would end

And Nouwen learned in time that the flier’s greatest challenge wasn’t to perfect his own skills, moves or techniques. His greatest challenge was to learn *trust*, to learn to trust the catcher; to learn that trying to anticipate where the catcher would be or struggling to reach him would only risk throwing off the balance and timing of coming together – to learn that, at the end of our part of the act, what we all have to do is let go of all our practiced and rehearsed skills, give up control, close our eyes and simply stretch out our arms in trust that the catcher will be there and grab us.

As I accompanied Jim, I saw his faith deepen into a confident trust that let him finally, simply hold out his arms and trust that his catcher would be there to grab him and pull him to safety – into the heart of a loving God. There Jim now rests – and perhaps scampers about -- enjoying the company of his parents, TJ Ryken, Catherine McCauley, Bro. James Garrity, Winston Churchill and so many others he admired and loved. Some of them may be chiding him a bit for romanticized or off-base historical details in his portrayals of them, but oh what great stories must be going around in glory!

Jim was clearly a “unique expression of God’s love” for each of us. May his life be an example of how we might choose to make our own limited and very conditional love the gateway for the unlimited and unconditional love of God. And may his new life now in glory be a way for him to continue to send God’s spirit to those whom he loved and who loved him.

We will all miss him. I already do!

Brother Arthur Caliman, CFX

Words of Remembrance

Twelve years ago as I was shamelessly lobbying my good friend, Brother James Kelly, to leave his beloved Saint X in Louisville to come to the Mount as our president, I could never have dreamed what our run together would have been like, and I certainly would never have wished it would have ended as it did this week. But, as Brother would have told me, “remember, Barry, we are useful, you and I, but not necessary.”

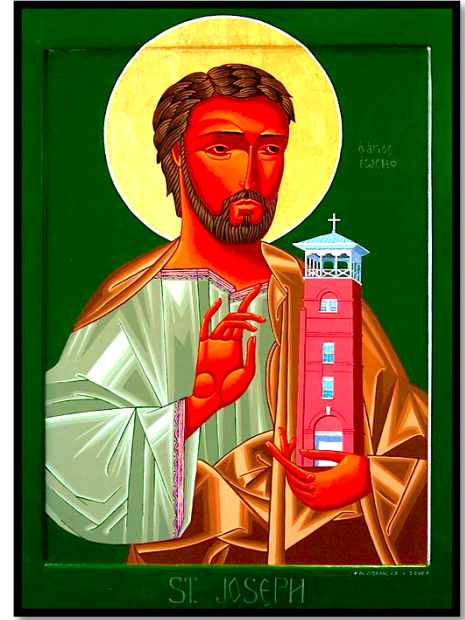
You men of the Mount Saint Joseph of today have been blessed, as have classes since 2002, to have this man lead your school as no other man before him. He re-introduced us to our Xaverian roots, teaching us about those giant founders, Brothers Bernardine, Dominic, Joseph, and Isidore without whom his Mount would not have been possible. He led us through the history of our school community, warts and all, helping us to understand what it means to be part of this Xaverian Mount family. He went out of his way to welcome those of us his colleagues to that same family as we learned from him how to respect that man that you boys would become.

During one particularly difficult time in his bout with cancer, I had to represent him at a meeting where Mount Saint Joseph would be evaluated on the effectiveness of its fulfillment of its mission, and I read the report I was to use as the basis for the discussion at the meeting, and I realized something was missing. An intangible, yet ever present and vibrant element of the Mount community appeared nowhere in the writing I was looking at that day. Now, if the report were simply a testimony to Brother’s accomplishments while President, I certainly could see citing fiscal stability, healthy enrollment, and new construction in my list, all things that were in the report and which clearly took place on his watch. But that was not what was missing.

In his own blissfully unfiltered way, he has carved out a place in our hearts and souls that only he can ever occupy. Last night one of his British Literature graduates gave me an award Brother had given him in English class his junior year. It reads: “the prestigious Stultissimus Puer Award, . . . bestowed. . . for the stupidest bloody answer this teacher has ever seen on a quiz!” Deep down, we all know that the spirituality from which he acted was founded firmly on the Xaverian principle that it is in the ordinary and sometimes unspectacular flow of every day life that we reveal our true selves, and ultimately find God, even when that life is attacked by illness, even when that life is called upon to respond to the tragedy of another, and perhaps especially when that life simply follows its heart and takes good care of the boys. It was Brother’s own spirituality lived out in his daily contact with us that was missing from that report. But luckily those of us who lived it with him wouldn’t need any reminder, certainly not as this man taught us how to accept God’s inscrutable yet adorable will.

This year, in response to a request Brother James wrote a prayer for the Mount to Saint Joseph. So this day, men of today’s Mount, the Mount Brother James built, rise with me in this Cathedral where Brother has presided over the last ten graduations of our school. Take out those cards on which his prayer is written, and let us send Brother home to God this day with his own words to his and our beloved Saint Joseph.

O great Saint Joseph, who heard the prayers of Brother Bernardine and obtained Mount Saint Joseph for your Xaverian Brothers, bless this school which proudly claims you as its patron. Through your intercession before the throne of God, may all Mount alumni become the men God intends them to be and may those who have died enjoy eternal life with you and all the saints. Be with the Mount, now and always, and with all those who hold the school in their hearts. May the Mount ever proclaim, clearly and courageously, its faith in your foster son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and may Christ find a dwelling place of faith in the heart of this school and in the hearts of the men who attend it. Amen.



Seniors stay standing. In his final words to you during his last live pep talk at school Brother said to you what he always says for several months. We will be here six months from yesterday, God willing, to celebrate your graduation. So, don't do anything between now and graduation that would jeopardize your graduation or break your mother's heart.

Last Tuesday, I had a chance to bring three of you over to Brother's house for one last visit. He told me it was ok to do so, and I heard him talk to the three of you about your older brother, your term papers on A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS, and other school stuff. As you were saying goodbye, he said to one of you that your mother was on the committee to pick his replacement, and you responded, "No one can replace you, Brother." No one can, no one will try.

What we promise to do is to take good care of the boys and in so doing honor you, my friend, who taught so many of us how to be better people. I have few tears today for you in this Cathedral who knew him, including myself. We are the lucky ones. We knew the sharpness of his wit, the warmth of his laughter, the quickness of his tongue, and the depth of his love. No, my tears today are for those future generations of young men who will know him only from our stories, and who will not have enjoyed the tender embrace that his life has provided us. He need not be idealized in death beyond what he was in life, which was just fine with us. He was a teacher, a good one, he knew it, we knew it, his students knew it, and God knew it.

As one of your former Mount students wrote to you just a few short weeks ago, Jim, you have propped us up on your shoulders quite long enough. To truly understand that to whom much has been given, from them much more is expected, we needed a true giant to show us the way. "Have courage for the great sorrows of life and patience for the small ones. And when you have laboriously accomplished your daily task, go to sleep in peace. God is awake!"

Barry Fitzpatrick
Principal, Mount St. Joseph HS

Words of Thanks

On behalf of Brother James' sister Pat, and the Xaverian Brothers, I briefly would like to thank a few people who have been so good to Brother James these past 2 plus years, and especially in the last few months of his life.

First of all,

- The physicians who guided his care and respected his decisions, especially his primary care provider, MSJ alum, Dr. Alan Reisinger, and his oncologist, Dr. William Sharfman, as well as the nurses and other care givers at Johns Hopkins Oncology Center and Stella Maris Hospice Services, especially his oncology nurse Linda and hospice nurse Lisa.
- Others who offered special support and care, especially his Hopewell cancer support group, his spiritual director Sulpician Fr. Al Giaquinto, and his friend Fr. Chris Whatley with whom Jim developed a good friendship when he first came to Baltimore and especially during his first bout with cancer.

I also want to express our gratitude to

- Mr. Barry Fitzpatrick, the Board, and the whole Mount St. Joseph community for their constant care, support and for allowing Brother James to remain a teacher and leader until his last breath. Brother James often said he could not have imagined going through what he went through these past years without the supportive environment that is the extended St. Joe family.
- All those other “religious families” whose histories he treasured and whose ministries he supported, especially the Sisters of Mercy; the Sisters of Bon Secours; our 5 co-sponsoring congregations at Mother Seton Academy: School Sisters of Notre Dame, Daughters of Charity, Sisters of St. Francis, Immaculate Heart of Mary Sisters of Scranton, and the Marianists; and a community that gave him extra love and support these past few years, the Little Sisters of the Poor.

I must also express my gratitude to you, Archbishop, for your support and care for Brother James. I'm sure you are aware of how grateful he was to be a recipient of the *Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice* medal last month; more importantly, however, he was grateful to you for your personal prayers and support.

On a side note, I will say that Brother James always had a unique relationship with the Ordinaries under whom he served, going back to Bishop Daniel Reilly in Connecticut and Archbishop Thomas Kelly in Louisville. It was to Archbishop Kelly that he once quipped that he wasn't sure Louisville was big enough for two Kelly's – needless to say, the Archbishop outlasted Brother James in Louisville. And you

will recall, Archbishop, your last visit to Brother James at his community residence the Sunday after Thanksgiving, when he boasted of the generosity of the Mount St. Joseph alumni and especially the lead donors who gave million dollar gifts. When you asked him the names of those donors, without missing a beat, he told you he would make sure those names were sent to you once you were safely in Rome. Brother Arthur did say that Brother James was “unique.”

Finally, I would be remiss if I did not note in a special way those who really accompanied Brother James on his roller coaster cancer journey,

- most especially his “constant companions” Mary Ellen Dolan and Chris Sapienza
- His local community (whom he called the “Irish Mafia”) of Brothers John Mahoney, Jerry O’Leary, Dan Lynch and Tom Murphy, who shared in both the good and the bad days in a special way and who opened their home to his wider circle of family, friends and brothers, especially in his last days
- His dear friend and fellow train aficionado, Brother Thomas Ryan, who unfailingly called Brother James at 8pm each night to check up on him and to let him know how much he was loved.
- And finally, his classmate and “health care buddy,” Brother Arthur Caliman, to whom Brother James turned whenever he needed to make a major decision in his life and who accompanied him to almost every medical consult he had. Brother Arthur patiently explained to Brother James what the doctor said, or in some cases, what the doctor meant to say, and promised to be with him through the end – a promise he fulfilled, as he always does.

Brother James planned this funeral liturgy, and God forbid that we veered from the plans he set, but he did it to teach us the meaning of redemption and of his sure and certain hope in the resurrection. Those who took part in this liturgy, especially the concelebrants, lectors, musicians, and the staff here at the Cathedral helped to make this a teachable moment for all of us – and so, I thank you.

Brother Lawrence Harvey, C.F.X.
General Superior