

Mass of the Resurrection
Br. Kevin O'Malley, C.P.
April 16, 1940 – May 19, 2011
St. Paul of the Cross Retreat Center
Detroit, Michigan

Kevin left a couple of pages of instructions for me in the case of his death. In the first instruction Kevin picked the music for his Mass of the Resurrection. In fact, he even had the musical scores and on the opening hymn Soon and Very Soon he wrote the word “lively!” You might want to know that the Prelude “Hallelujah” was selected by our niece Jennifer, and sung by our nephew Dennis. In the second instruction Kevin left a list of names I was to notify about his death. Some of the people I recognized others I did not. So I thought I would find many of these persons if I checked the “Missed Calls” on his cell phone, which he was not able to respond to since April 23rd.

One number appeared a couple of times, so when I returned the call a gentleman answered the call I explained I was Fr. Kenneth O'Malley, a brother to Br. Kevin O'Malley and that Kevin has died on Thursday. This number was on his cell phone's “missed calls.” The gentleman thanked me for the call and said he would get the information out to the membership. I asked him what was the name of the organization to which Kevin belonged? He responded: “The Manhattan Project.” When I returned to the monastery I asked the men if they knew what this organization did since I was pretty sure Kevin wasn't interested in nuclear physics! They all sort of laughed and said: “Well you know, Kevin was awfully fond of manhattans! Enough said.

I picked the Scripture readings for this Mass. The first one is from the Philippians. I selected this passage because in the New Testament we have thirteen letters composed by the Apostle Paul. In his letters Paul begins his epistles by saying: “I, Paul, an apostle of the Lord am here with a message....” In Philippians, it is different because he begins, by saying: “I Paul a servant of the Lord, to the servants of the Lord. I thank God every time I remember you ... I always pray for you with joy.” In other words I come to you as a friend! In all the other epistles: 1st and 2nd Corinthians, Colossians, Ephesians, Galatians, etc. Paul does not do this but with the Philippians they were his friends, close to his heart. I chose this reading because one of Kevin's qualities was that he made deep and lasting friendships.

The second passage I selected was from Matthew 25:14-30. The Parable of the Talents. I can not think of Kevin without thinking of him as a man of many talents. He holds this honor *maximum cum laude*.

Kevin entered Mother of Good Council Seminary in Normandy, Missouri after he graduated from grade school. My parents asked themselves if they should buy him a round trip ticket because they were thinking that Kevin just wanted to take the train ride from Detroit to St. Louis. Kevin came to MGCS to prepare to become a priest. During his time there he met two men who impressed him deeply, Brs. John Gebauer and David

Williams. The kindness and holiness of these two men who touched him so deeply prompted Kevin to become a Brother.

After Kevin finished his sophomore year he went directly to the novitiate in St. Paul, Kansas. As Providence would have it, Br. David Williams was transferred to St. Paul also. He was the instructor of the brother candidates. Br. David was Kevin's hero and an excellent role model. Besides being a transparently holy person, David was fluent in French, Italian and Spanish. He was a lover of classical music, and a voracious reader. All talents and gifts Kevin loved, and imitated.

Also at this same time Br. Anthony Mimiaga, a mail carrier from Los Angeles, who also spoke Spanish entered the novitiate. So in order to be a part of the conversation in the novitiate, Kevin had to learn Spanish.

In 1959 after the death of our father, Kevin was assigned to Louisville, where I was beginning my first year of theology. Within three months Kevin was sent to Our Mother of Good Council Seminary in Warrenton, Missouri to be infirmarian and tailor. OMGCS was fifty miles west of St. Louis, on 860 acres, a herd of Black Angus cattle, 300+ seminarians and a senior community of about thirty-three men. So besides being infirmarian it was his duty to make cassocks for the seminarians and religious habits for the senior community, also.

Kevin was sent to St. Louis University Hospital to be trained in first aid. Fr. Roger Mercurio, the local superior received a letter from the teaching staff at SLUH saying Kevin was such a bright student he would benefit more from being in the Licensed Practical Nursing Program. So Kevin was the first brother sent to get a degree for Holy Cross Province.

At Warrenton besides the seminary there was a retreat house. On the weekends there were retreats for the laity, and during the week there were clergy or high school retreats. There was a group of high school senior boys from Jefferson City, Missouri who were a challenge to the staff. So Kevin was invited to be a part of the retreat team at these times. They use to assign Kevin the most difficult, the Neanderthals, as they were nick named. He was able to calm them down and have them eating out of his hands before they left. They loved him.

When OMGCS was closed Kevin was the first brother to be made Vocational Director for Holy Cross Province. He lived at I.C. monastery in Chicago on the third floor with the Provincial Staff. Here he became very close friends with Frs. Neil Parsons, Paul Boyle, James Patrick White and eventually Roger Mercurio. He was sent to Stanford University for an investment program. Kevin became the first brother to be elected to the HCP Provincial Council. He was assigned the area of HCP investments. He was greatly responsible for the recovery of approximately \$5,000,000 of lost investments, and over \$1,000,000 in the interest lost. Here he displayed his raw intelligence and heroic courage during a nine year struggle to regain this loss. After this he was the first brother to be

made a Retreat House director. After this Kevin was the first brother to be elected to the General Council in Rome.

When Kevin returned from Rome, the first thing he did was to take the GRE. I was totally surprised, that in spite of all the talents he had demonstrated, and the “firsts” he had achieved – the burden that he bore and could not forget was that he never had a high school diploma! The second thing he did was get a Bachelor Degree from St. Joseph College in Calumet City, Indiana. The third thing he did was to get a Master Degree in the School of New Learning at De Paul University. The degree was in domestic violence and immigration law.

In spite of all these accomplishments. In spite of all these talents it is not how we who remember and love Kevin hold him in our hearts. For us:

1. **Kevin was a lover of people.** Across the street from our home on Petosky there was a family named Redding. In this family there was an elderly white hair uncle named Charles. Somehow Kevin as a little fellow struck up a friendship with Charles. When Charles left I remember how broken hearted Kevin was when he realized his friend would not return. I could not understand what these two people had in common that would cause Kevin to be so desolate at Charles’ departure. What I didn’t grasp was that Kevin really loved people.
2. **Kevin was an affectionate person.** He never went to bed without kissing my mother and father good night. I use to wondered to myself: “When is he going to grow up.” What I didn’t know Kevin was grown up and a genuinely affection person.
3. **Kevin was a person of faith and friendships.** In our family there was a rule “Not to cross Livernois.” It was a busy street, a block from where we lived. Somehow Kevin had a little girl friend named Karen who lived on the other side of Livernois. He had another friend named Dennis Halme who also lived across Livernois. What was unusual about this was that Dennis was Lutheran. At my Father’s wake in 1959 a gentleman came to the wake and spoke to my Mother. He said he was Pastor Ruff, the pastor of the local Lutheran Church. He told my mother he was the father of three children, but he never met a child like Kevin who could talk about his faith with such lucidity and conviction. He use to enjoy speaking with Kevin so much he felt he had to meet Kevin’s parents to complement them on their wonderful child.

After Kevin left for OGSC Kevin and Dennis Halme lost track of each other. About a year ago, Kevin received telephone call from Dennis Halme. He was living in St. Paul, Minnesota. He called to tell Kevin how much his friendship had meant to him after all these years. He also told Kevin how much he loved him. Kevin was so happy to hear from Dennis he immediately me to tell me about this phone call, and his voice broke when he called and “and he told me he loved me.”

Needless to say one of the names on Kevin's "Names to be Contacted" was Dennis Halme. In our conversation Dennis told me things I never knew and I know my parents never did either. These two little ecumenists decided that they would visit each others church. So one Sunday Kevin and Dennis attended the Lutheran Church and the next they would attend St. Gregory. That seemed fair in their minds. Kevin also helped out at our home parish. One of Kevin's assignments for Msgr. Prokriefka was to put the Sunday collection envelopes and pencils in the church pews Saturday afternoons before the Sunday Masses. Dennis said that people would be waiting to go to Confession or saying their prayers. Nothing was going to stand in the way of getting this job done. So they thought nothing of disturbing the peoples in their prayers. Those envelopes and pencils had to be in their place.

Most of the plane trips I take are pretty routine. However, not Kevin, once he helped an elderly woman with her baggage from one flight to her connecting flight. Afterwards they exchange business cards with personal telephone numbers. She was Margaret Mead, the renowned anthropologist!

4. **Kevin was a lover of family.** When Kevin started the Passionist Volunteers Corp he invited Kenneth, one of our nephews and John McCarthy my cousin's son to go with the PVC to Baja, California. He also invited vowed Passionists, like James Patrick White, to come. When our niece Carrie moved to Chicago to attend the School of the Art institute, Kevin invited her to share his apartment, which he had while attending DePaul University.

When Kevin was infirmarian at OMGCS he diagnosed many of the first semester illnesses for the freshmen boys as a "case of home sickness." He had the perfect cure: "chocolate milk shakes" several times a day. It seemed to have great medicinal powers. For all other illnesses he would say "take two aspirins and soak it."

In conversation with Kevin, I was always astonished at the stories he knew about the deceased members of HCP. The sources for these stories were: Br. David Williams, Frs. Stanislaus Geekie, Roger Mercurio, Neil Parson, James Patrick White, and Paul Boyle. After these stories and my laughing subsided I would encourage Kevin to write these stories down. In fact, it was one of the resolution I made while on sabbatical to records these stories. Alas, it is true: "The saddest word of tongue or pen are those words of what had been!"

5. **Kevin was a lover of humor, music, stories and a mimic.** Classical, Country, Gregorian, Contemporary, Irish, Opera, etc. Those who are old enough will remember his singing "The Banks of the Ohio," "Last Thing On My Mind." After I finished teaching my morning classes at OMGC in Warrenton, I couldn't wait to get over to the Infirmary because Kevin always had something astonishing to share. I don't know how he did it. Here we were fifty miles from civilization but somehow Kevin knew everything that was going on the

community, the province, and the world. But more often it was something more prosaic. Once when I arrived at the infirmary Kevin asked me if I ever heard of the song: “Last Thing On My Mind” by the Women Folk?” Of course I hadn’t so he said: “Just wait a minute.” When he came back he turned the radio on to the local Warrenton Radio Station. The DJ said: “We have a request by Mr. John Redman for “Last Thing On My Mind” by the Women Folk.” When the song was over I said to Kevin. “How in the world did you know that song was going to be on the radio at this time?” He replied: “I am Mr. John Redman!”

Many of us can remember Kevin’s famous imitations: Mayor Richard Daley, Martin Luther King, Jr., Barnabas Ahern, Kevin Cunningham, Stanislaus Geekie, and Walter Kaelin to name a few.

6. **Kevin was a lover of animals.** When we were children had this “stray dog complex.” He use to bring home every stray dog he could find. We would go to school and when we came home at the end of the day, the dog was gone. My mother had eight children to raise and she couldn’t take in Kevin’s strays. Of course Kevin’s heart would be broken every time.

When Kevin was in the novitiate in St. Paul, Kansas, there was a Great Dane named “Champ.” In the novitiate there was a practice of silence we were all encourage to help maintain a spirit of recollection and prayer. So novices were allowed to speak to only the Superior, the Master of Novices, the Assistant Master of Novices. Fr. Faustinus Moran was Kevin’s Master of Novices. We also had a practice called “Culpa.” So if a novice broke a dish, came late for prayer, etc. we would kneel and ask pardon before our morning classes. I am sure Faustinus got a kick out of this, but he told Kevin that he had to make Culpa whenever he broke the silence and talked with Champ. This is another “first” we have to immortalize Kevin in Holy Cross Province.

We all know of the love affair Kevin had for George, the German Shepherd, the stray that followed Sebastian home. Kevin use to claim “George was the only one who understood him!”

7. **Kevin was a lover of knowledge.** When he went to the Nazareth Nursing Home he took a book “The Famine Ships” and the “Wall Street Journal.” In his room there were any number of books among them were a series of dictionaries: Biblical Hebrew, French, Greek, Italian, Polish, and Spanish. All these language he either proficient in or was learning. Also there was a copy of the Koran. As all the books have a story, but this is particularly typical of Kevin. Once he was out walking and became suddenly weak and had to flag down a taxi to get back to the Monastery. He struck up a conversation with Aman, the taxi driver. Aman insisted that whenever Kevin needed a ride he be called. So Kevin figured to better understand Aman and his kindness he needed to study the Koran to understand Islam. It sounds to me there were numerous Pastor Ruffs in Kevin’s life.

Conclusion: Kevin was a man of many talents. He was a Philippian man, a lover of people, a brave and courageous man. Not once in the four years of his struggle with cancer did Kevin complain about his illness. Once when I went to visit Kevin I mentioned how busy I was. He replied to me: “Kenneth, if you tell me once more how busy you are, I am going to tell you how I really feel.” Needless to say I never alluded to my being busy again.

This would be Kevin’s prayer for us as it was for the Apostle Paul. “This is my prayer. That your love abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ to the praise and glory of God. Amen.”

May Kevin rest in peace. Amen.

Kenneth O’Malley, C.P.
April 23, 2011