

MIDWEST – MIDWEEK

Brothers of Holy Cross – Midwest Province - P.O. Box 460 – Notre Dame, Indiana 46556-0460

Dec 22, 2021



Merry
Christmas
and a
Blessed New
Year

Brother James Blaszak, C.S.C.

Reflection by Brother Kenneth Haders, C.S.C.



On behalf of the Brothers of Holy Cross, Midwest Province and of the Blaszak family, I want to thank all for being here to celebrate the life of our brother, James.

I first met Brother James Blaszak when I came to join Holy Cross in 1968. I lived in Basil Hall, and James was the cook at the Provincial House. At the time, I erroneously saw him as rather aloof. But then I learned he was trying to be a good brother, and professed brothers did not fraternize with postulants: those aspiring to be brothers. As I progressed in the community, we were assigned to the same places, and we became close – and not just because I always make it a point to be friends with the community cook. Even though I grew up in the suburb of a fairly large city, I was interested in the activities on the farm, and during his many years at LeMans Academy, James was either helping with the chores on Silver Lake Farm or raising his own animals for slaughter and sale. Even when I was working in Chicago, I seldom made the trip to Notre Dame without stopping to see James. I always found him working – either in the kitchen or out on the farm.

I would describe James as a lovable character, and I did love him. The following is a quote from Brother John Tryon, and I am using it because I fully agree with what he says, and I couldn't have said it better. I quote:

When Jimmy talked to me, he focused on me and didn't give a flying fig if someone more important entered the room. He had a wonderful, sometimes biting, often self-deprecating, sense of humor. At times, when he was making fun of himself, I felt he was pointing out my own faults; he did it with wonderful humor, and I could acknowledge his fraternal corrections, given with love. He was a gift from God. His death is a loss to our province and the Congregation.

John also mentioned that James often had funny jokes, including some that we

could describe as a bit “off color.”

On the farm, in addition to helping get needed work done, James always had some angle he was working. Some of his more regular projects involved raising poultry for slaughter and sale. One time, when I was on my way back to Chicago, he asked me to deliver some dressed poultry (I think two ducks) to the Chicago home of Jesse Jackson, whose son had been a student at the academy. On another occasion James gave me a demonstration of how dumb turkeys are. He had decided to raise turkeys for Thanksgiving and had quite a few of them. He demonstrated how they, compared to chickens and ducks, could not even figure out the daily feeding process. The chickens knew that when he would walk out, making his usual friendly noises, they were going to be fed and would run to him. The turkeys never made any connection between him and food and seemed dumbfounded when they would get hit in the head with the feed he was spreading.

In reality, stories of James in the kitchen or on the farm are stories about a hardworking and generous man who served others with selflessness and kindness. Each year at the novitiate, he had a different group of novices, and each year he learned what the new group liked or didn't like to eat. He had no problem with learning and catering to the uniqueness of each group, though he still managed occasionally to work in some of the things he liked best. He made homemade bread and desserts (when allowed) whether he was feeding 160 boys and teachers at LeMans Academy or when he had ten novices in Cascade, because he knew they were enjoyed and appreciated. He planted vegetables, because homegrown was better – even though it was a lot more work for him. He was aware of others, and often reached out to individuals who some may have considered too ornery to bother with. James was a welcome presence because his approach was subtle, kind, respectful and sometimes conspiratorial. I remember his driving from LeMans to Columba Hall to pick up Brother Lewis Leimeister so Lewie could help in the vegetable garden. Lewie was often boisterous and accusatory, telling anyone who would listen what he thought was or wasn't healthy and what dietary supplements were good to take in order to stay healthy. But James just quietly chuckled when he found a significant number of Snickers wrappers under the dirt where Louie had been hoeing weeds that week.

Whether with the students at LeMans, the brothers at the Brothers Center or the novices in Cascade, James seemed to know when someone just needed a friendly ear in a quiet place, and he listened without judgement, and often with real encouragement. He also seemed to know when and how to say, “Now, get out of here and go where you belong.” But if you were lucky, and he thought you might be ready to hear it, he gave you sage and practical advice that came from the heart of a true brother.

James didn’t spend much time watching TV or reading. He listened and he prayed and he laughed. He had a wonderful sense of humor and carefully chose who would hear certain jokes. Going out to sit with James while he smoked his cigarettes was a gift because it was time spent with a truly good man who shared good stories, listened with interest, and usually worked in an excuse for a good laugh. He even tolerated us do-gooders who tried to get him to stop smoking. We all knew he was not going to change.

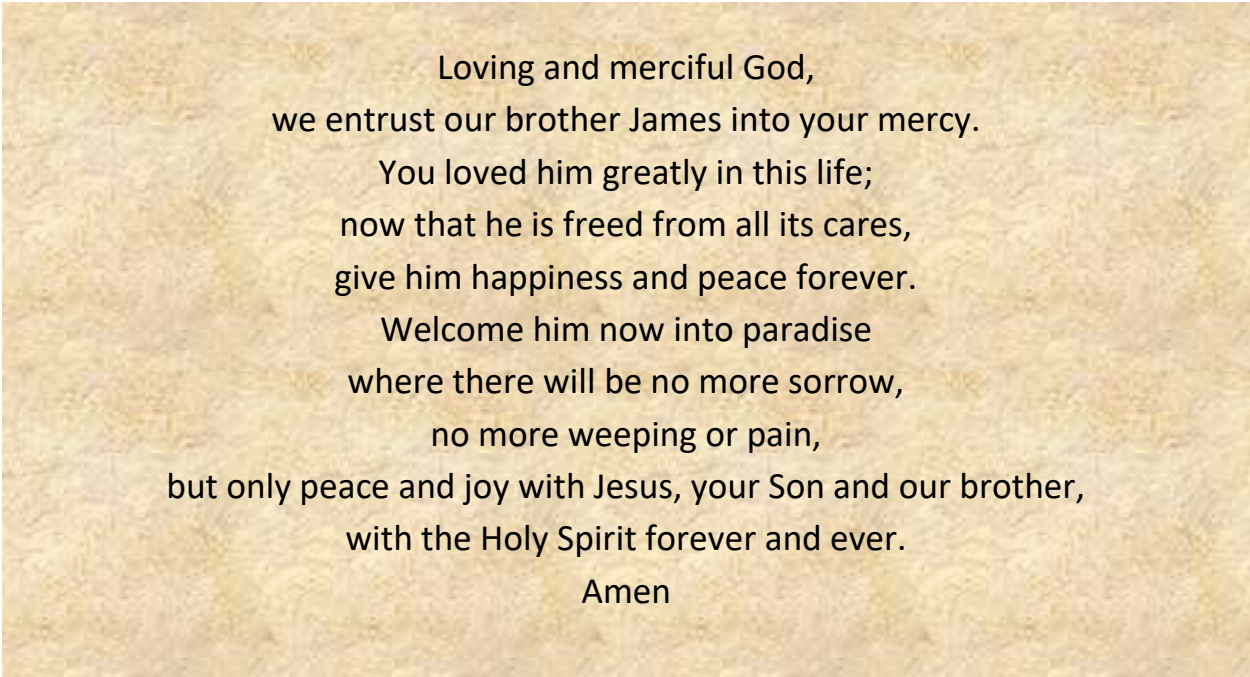
Richard Rohr has written about the grace that we find in our everyday life, even when it might seem like a failure or a cause for suffering. Rohr says God often comes to us “disguised as our own life.” Anything and everything can prod us toward God, especially when what is going on is, at least on the surface, kind of humbling. Simply put, God’s revelation is in our everyday life. Rohr even says that suffering, failure, or weakness can cause us to be more open to new opportunities for learning and loving; that the stumbles and challenges of our life break down the walls of our false self and open us to a deeper love; to see God more clearly and to be a better person, a better brother.

I don’t know, but I doubt James ever read Rohr’s books. He just knew his God and how he encountered that God. He did see God in his life, even the bad parts, and it sometimes caused him to chuckle. He was good at laughing at himself, which he did often. He knew that we are measured by the good we do today, regardless of what could drag us down. Maybe that’s why he worked so hard.

James encouraged me to be good to myself and to care more about others. He reminded me that I can let go of what is holding me back and be open to what is already there to lead me to be my better self. He reminded me that I didn’t always need to put things into words, but I did need to show that I cared with my

actions. And most importantly, James reminded me that I am loved, no matter what, and that I am not alone. For me, James was a respected and loved brother – one grounded in real life, steeped in practicality and trying to be better every day. He didn't give me things, he shared himself -- and I will miss him.

So, let us all pray for his eternal peace:



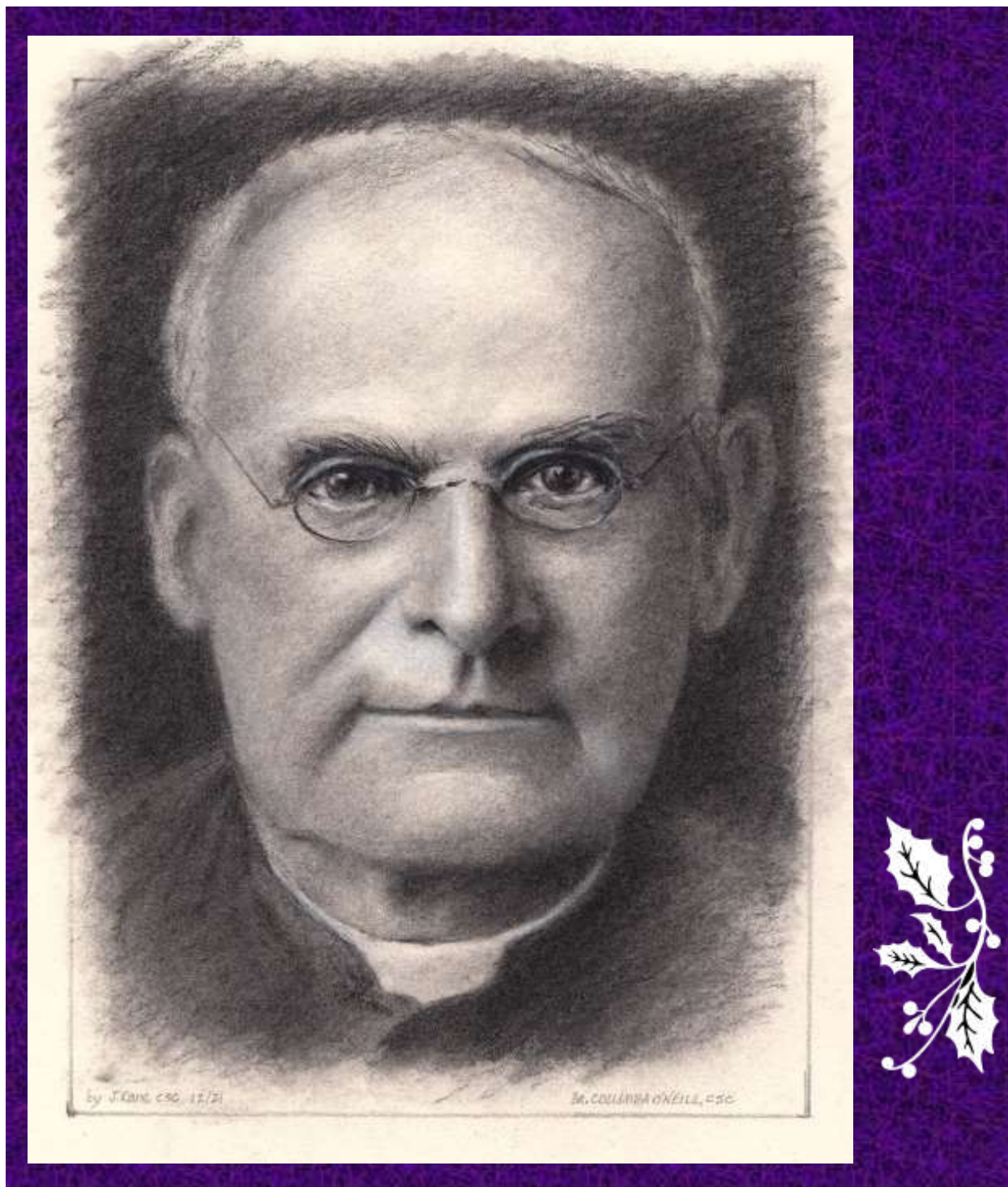
Loving and merciful God,
we entrust our brother James into your mercy.

You loved him greatly in this life;
now that he is freed from all its cares,
give him happiness and peace forever.

Welcome him now into paradise
where there will be no more sorrow,
no more weeping or pain,
but only peace and joy with Jesus, your Son and our brother,
with the Holy Spirit forever and ever.

Amen

Charcoal Rendition of Brother Columba O'Neill
A Brother James Kane Project



Walter received an early Christmas gift
Sunday, December 12, 2021



It was at a Notre Dame ladies basketball game where Brother Walter Gluhm spotted "Muffet" McGraw in the stands. At that time Muffet had been inducted into ND's *Ring of Honor*. Walter was able to go over, shake her hand, and mention that the Brothers enjoyed her past visit to Columba Hall and thought she was great. Walter now has a picture of them standing together at the game.

Photos were taken in a dining area. Walter was fortunate to be one of those who posed with Muffet.



Columba Hall Hawk



This unmasked visitor comes seeking a meal. He often is seen here on the railing of Columba Hall's patio. Last Monday morning, Brother Jerome Meyer spotted the hawk.

Holy Cross Roads Writings for the Journey

What Does Commitment to Community Mean?

Dear Associates and Friends,

We know that being Christian means that our spirituality must go beyond our own small world and reach out to others. “They will Know We are Christians by Our Love” as the song reminds us. In the communities that we join we cannot isolate into thinking “us and them.” At the same time, we need to get our love and support in community so that we are able to serve others not in a needy way. St. Paul uses the Greek word “agape,” love. Our love needs to be out going for the “other.” Our personal needs are addressed in our local communities – our family and friends, our religious communities, our parishes, in lay communities such as associates.

What does commitment to community mean? It could mean we are sharing our spiritual journey with other fellow travelers receiving and giving the moments of grace that we have experienced on the way. With Christ and the saints as our guide, we can feel certain that we are headed in the right direction. In these challenging times we can be sustained as our own needs are met and as we serve others.

- Have you had a calling to join a particular community?
- If so, what graces have you received as a result?
- Does being a part of a community help you to reach out to others in service?

O God, sustain me in my commitment to the communities in my life.



Brother Carl Sternberg, C.S.C.

For more reflections to grow spiritually please visit our new blog
<https://weeklyspiritualinsights.org/>

From the *Voice of Moreau Website*

The website features a Holy Cross sister, a brother, or a priest, with a weekly story on the blog. Check the following link below.



Website: <http://www.voiceofmoreau.org/>



**Brother
Philip Smith**



**Brother
Ben Rossi**



Reflection
Sent in by Brother Thomas Maddix, C.S.C.



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Choose peace and love will follow.”

— Pope Francis

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Brother
James
Kane,
CSC



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