

MIDWEST – MIDWEEK

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

November 30, 2022



Peace Candles

Eulogy for Br. Jerome Kroetsch, C.S.C.

By

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How do you define simplicity? More importantly, how do you define holy?

Well, we know it when we see it—the real thing—and we’ve seen both, simplicity I’m pretty sure, holiness as well in Br. Jerome Francis Kroetsch, C.S.C.

Yes, we can dare to apply all that to Brother Jerome’s life here today recalling his witness as best we can.

The difficulty, though, is that those terms, **simple** and **holy**, might be seen by some as demeaning or even a simplistic sense of those terms. Simple in the sense, as the world might have it, can be a shallow, condescending notion of the virtue of simplicity. It can also be made in a patronizing or off-putting way and totally miss the mark. But, not so with Brother Jerome.

Adele Calhoun, a professionally trained spiritual director and author, in her reflection on simplicity puts it best. She sums up the goal of simplicity, “to uncomplicate and untangle my life so I can focus on what really matters.” But it was not a goal of Jerome. It simply was Jerome—simplicity as in virtue, and yes, holy—maybe even wholeness—in Jerome as we saw him at the core—“He in whom there is no guile.”

To underscore such an evaluation, I'd like to turn now to a hymn's lyrics as an example. It is from a peaceful and gentle group of men and women just like Jerome, The Quakers.

Quite some time ago our Columba Hall chairs needed repair badly, and there were a lot of them. It was much too big a job even for the house, Jack-of-all-trades fix-it men, Jerome Kroetsch or John Schuszler.

So Jerome went to his good and longtime, personal friends, the Quakers, to enlist their help. We can see in Jerome, what is in those the lyrics by the Quakers revealing precisely this good and humble man.

Their lyrics go this way. "Tis a gift to be simple; tis a gift to be free; tis a gift to come down where we ought to be, and when we find ourselves in the place just right, it will be in the valley of love and delight.

And further,

"When true simplicity is gained, to bow and to bend we will not be ashamed. To turn, to turn will be our delight, till by turning, turning, we come 'round right.

That so-called "turning" is the call for all of us to work on. For that, though, Jerome did not have to work, it was much more yielding. His grand-nephew may have put it the best—Brayden said his uncle was simply the **GOAT**, that is--the **Greatest Of All Time**.

It wasn't Tom Brady he was referring to; it was his loving uncle, a simple saintly man, disarming in his humility and connected incredibly to the gospel and the following of Jesus Christ, his Lord and Savior, and, of course, Mary, his special friend.

"Take off your shoes you are on holy ground."

I do not speak metaphorically, or share an inflated reflection or eulogy here.

As a case in point, I will just mention a few examples here, events, or illustrations Jerome laid before us in his witnessing to the gospel and the gospel's equally simple mandatel—love one another.

Br. Jerome Kroetsch was unique among us, exceptional, rare, probably without peer. He was “who he was” for all who knew him or even met him for the first time. He was disarming in his gentle self and manifested such by his practically perpetual smile exhibiting the very nature of the man.

Example Number One...

Not that many years ago, to my surprise and honor, Jerome approached me when we were both working at the infirmary. He had been volunteering to distribute communion and visit the Brothers. He was faithfulness itself especially to the elderly throughout the place and especially in the Memory Care Unit. He saw the sick and the infirm as needing mostly his kindness and attention, and he gave it to them. He eventually became a much-needed sacristan at Dujarie, in his so-called retirement. I was there in my own capacity, and he approached me one day quite some time ago and asked if I would do his eulogy.

Did he know even then his days were numbered? (I think so.)

Still, there was no life-threatening diagnosis then and his deficits were few. It was but a simple yet humbling request for both of us put straightforwardly to me. “Would you do my eulogy?” I stammered a bit, and said yes, still overwhelmed at the time, and put the thought behind me.

Thinking back, perhaps close to a year ago now and with the intervening time as a buffer to reflect on that time, Jerome’s witness and care of the sick and needy was remarkable. The man knew something else was going on in his life made manifest in many small and imperceptible ways as one looks back. There had been a request to all of us from our leadership to write something of our own about our lives as our numbers dwindle and the older we get. That was not, I think, the motivation for Jerome to share of his life. He wrote no eulogy, but he did share quite a bit about himself, his work, and his journey.

Here, as an example, is but a part of the work and ministry that is most

telling of his whole life gleaned from some personal observation and wonderful private conversations with Jerome as well.

In part of his daily rounds at Dujarie, one day after he had distributed all the hosts from the small golden pyx he carried with him, as if to even physically keep his most personal friend, Jesus, close to his heart, he spoke of something miraculous—Shall we call it maraculous? And, why would we deny it especially coming from Jerome.

That day, and that something miraculous he recalled to me went like this. He had finished distributing communion for the day and when he went to clean the crumbs from the base of the pyx that carried the now completely consumed and consecrated hosts, and as he was about to wet his finger to his lips to attach the crumbs, he said he looked and saw “a rich, red drop of blood” in the bottom of the empty pyx. No simple blotch or smear, he insisted. And as he, himself, saw the drop of blood, he was definitely amazed and taken aback.

So, he checked his hands for any nick, scratch or cut coming from whatever he might have received earlier without knowing it, and he said there was no scratch or cut at all, nowhere on his hands. “Nothing like that,” he insisted. And then, after some reflection and quiet, he eventually said, “Ah, ha! Jesus was telling me and telling **us** (emphasizing the word, us, how much Jesus loves the sick and especially the elderly.” He told me, he then devoutly and reverently consumed the “bright, red, drop of blood” before washing out the pyx at the sink and kept his experience to himself.

But how did he get to be doing this kind of work with such devotion and single focused commitment? What else in the particulars of his religious life, so adroitly put together by Phil Smith in the obituary and also recalled by Bill Blum in his homily, what brought Jerome Kroetsch to the door and the ranks of being a Brother, a Brother whose life itself in everything he did was an act of service and compassion, in honor of and in duty to, his best friend, Jesus. Yes, Jerome spoke in those very terms simple, sincere and to the point.

Another example... He had, he said, before even considering the Brothers been deeply in love with a woman and wanted to marry her. It was real. He was going to marry her, (or so he thought), and he planned to do so but

was also troubled about a nagging something going on inside him. What should he do with this inner struggle?

To emphasize the sincerity of the point Jerome told me of his prayer during that time in his life. He said to Mary, (for he always had a great devotion to Mary) “Mary why are you getting between us? And by that he meant he wanted to do both, get closer to God and get closer to a woman he loved and wanted to marry.

He was very sincere and unapologetic in reporting exactly the dilemma. And further, he heard something direct inside, and I quote. The voice said, “Don’t love the created more than the creator.” Now what to do?

Not to be deterred, he made a wager caught between the two options. “O.K., Mary, find me a job where I can go to Mass every day.”

He didn’t even know then what a Brother was, but he knew he wanted God and his girlfriend too.

The rest of this part of his story is history as they say, like the mystery of any vocation and call from God, marriage, singleness, religious vocation, all of them. The rest of his life’s work is in that well put together summary by Philip Smith our archivist. From that you can well conclude throughout his life he always worked in profound contact and connection with his friends Jesus and Mary—here, there, and everywhere—the missions, the farm, Hoban, Columba Hall, and the infirmary.

Most touchingly so, in the dwindling days before Jerome became bed-bound with his recent decline, we had another conversation.

He told me explicitly, “If you follow me, you follow **me**,” he said speaking of Jesus and his personal response to his vocation and his ministries. He was almost cajoling or at least admonishing me to do the same.

Jesus and Jesus’ way was the clear voice of whose orders we were to follow in religious life. “If you follow me, **follow** me.” He said again. Similar emphasis.

And, as one might rightly surmise, Jerome’s compassion and kindness of a life time returned to him in the end, full circle, attesting to the truth of the old idiom, “What goes around, comes around.” Not always though, and not

always to everyone in the mystery of God's ways, confounding as they are. Think of any tragic death unexplained and baffling.

What set in motion the beginning of the end of Jerome's life was his physical deterioration. And so, when the Brothers' physician, Dr. Robert Cassady, ordered a medical test, an MRI, and found the results were dire and in an advanced stage, Dr. Cassady personally and with great compassion chose to visit Jerome in his own setting, right at Columba, and sensitively divulge the seriousness of his diagnosis.

Jerome opted pretty much on the spot to yield to what the stark reality before him was calling him to do and what one can only surmise from a previous sense of what he alluded to his whole life. And that was, to yield to his friend, Jesus' call at this point of his life. The result, Jerome chose hospice, hospice as the embodiment of his courage and his devotion to his God—to live until he died, that's what hospice was, no extraordinary interventions or procedures, just awaiting his body's time to fail and his soul to wend its way back to his God from whence it came.

Later, when Jerome had become bed bound, his energy depleted and under appropriate meds for palliation, a further example of Jerome's consistency was again given us.

Through it all, our consistent and compassionate C.N.A's loving care was always there. They came to his bedside once when he had become somewhat fidgety, probably wrestling with the body's refusal to let go and let the soul fly home, and Jerome was asked whether he wanted a Tylenol to help with whatever they had observed as needing more support and comfort measures. "Do you want a Tylenol, Brother Jerome," was the offering? "No," he said, "Jesus didn't have a Tylenol," and then he refused the med.

That tenacity and courage showed itself previously in other facets of his life and especially as a socially engaged Catholic looking not to himself but to others, always the other. No meek and humble wall-flower here.

He wrote the president, he wrote Congress, he wrote the local pols, he voted faithfully and wrote poetry in between. Jerome was a fully engaged citizen using his spirituality as the force which gave him direction.

Similarly, in another conversation, Jerome spoke of his angst over the poor men and women of Ukraine and the cruelty and unconscionable atrocities Putin had forced on a whole population of peaceful people. He urged me to pray frequently and pray hard for the people of Ukraine. Even as he was slipping away he was focused on the poor. “We all have to pray,” he said. “All of us, we have to pray.”

Closer to home and closer to our own life in these times, in a moment of pique perhaps, Jerome said that the early church really shared with one another personally about their own individual spiritual lives. “And we don’t do that,” he said almost plaintively.

At another time Jerome had done damage to his leg by tripping in his room resulting in a pretty good gash in the side of his leg. In speaking of this, he smiled again his usual and natural, sweet smile, and in the retelling, told me that when it had happened he said, “O.K., God, that’s the first one. What’s next?”

He was already declining and he had previously and explicitly prayed for humility he said, and he would endure whatever came next from his God and from his condition.

After his energy waned, and the physical declining and lingering looked like he was maybe coming to a final end, and as the CNAs on staff were bathing him to keep him comfortable, he woke from the procedure and mustered enough of a voice and asked them clearly, “Why are you here? Aren’t I in heaven?”

Similarly, when the hospice nurse who visited him and oversaw the case with regularity said to him, toward the end of one of her visits, “Well, I will see you next Wednesday, Brother Jerome.” He replied back very definitely, “Well, I won’t be here; I’ll be in heaven, see you there.” The nurse replied she herself was not quite ready to go yet and hoped to see him again soon.

It was not to be. Jerome died before the next visit day and in yet another possible message to us, he crossed the great divide on Thanksgiving morning a mere hour or so before we, his Brothers in community from the area, gathered at Columba’s chapel for one of his loved devotions—the Mass, Thanksgiving Day Mass, as we took into consideration our own thankfulness for our country and for our very lives themselves pondering in

our hearts that very day and time the life and witness of this man among us in community and ministry, and in gratitude and thanksgiving for it.

The man who saw his whole life as one of giving to others with gratitude himself and unflinching kindness performed his one last act of kindness, in a sense, by donating his very brain to Rush Presbyterian Hospital in Chicago and their study of the brain's decline especially in Religious.

How would we define the virtue of **simplicity**? And how would we define **holy** if we saw it face to face in the life of a person in our midst?

Brother Jerome has given us a pretty significant example as to how it went in his own life, in one man's life, and what simplicity virtue and holiness as a goal can look like.

Thomas Merton once said, "For me to be a saint is to be who I am."

Rest in peace, good Brother, now home forever with your best friends forever, Jesus and Mary. We will miss you.

Come, Lord Jesus. Be our friend, too.

A Mystical Presence

We can have knowledge of a presence
and yet not be fully alert to its reality.

We may be unaware of it by sight,
 sound, or smell,
 and yet, have an inkling as to
 whether it's good,
or something we should quell.

Though mystical, if this presence is
 good,

 it's one we need not repel,
as sincere love is good, that's
 understood;

so this presence we need not quell,
but enter our minds upon Almighty
 God,

and in God alone we may peacefully
 dwell.

Of the Mystical Body of Christ, as Saint
 Paul said,

 "We are many parts,
yet one body in him who dwells in us."

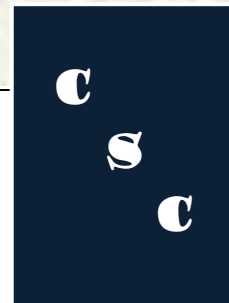
 Therefore, let us not be misled by a
 disciple of Satan,
for it's always his aim to lead us astray,
down a wrong path, in hopes we'll be
 forsaken.

Now, as part of his mystical body I am,
I pray I'd be willing to play my part
if called to be his sacrificial lamb,
as every day a loved one's blood is
 shed,

 not on Satan's behalf,
but to help save some poor souls
 instead.

—Brother Jerome Kroetsch, CSC

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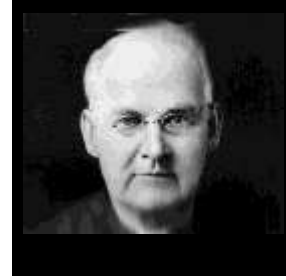
Columba Hall Thanksgiving 2022

We started with prayer ...



... and ended with a meal.

Brother Columba O'Neill, C.S.C.
Servant of God



Website

<https://brothercolumba.com/>



Brother Philip Smith, C.S.C.
Postulator of the cause for Brother Columba

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Holy Cross Roads Writings for the Journey

What's is Holding us back?

What is holding us back from being our true selves? Could it be from the pressures that we feel from the culture that is so much a part of our lives? In the American mystique we have the notion of the “self-made man or woman” when in reality no one is an island unto himself or herself. Many have come to believe that we alone can take full credit for the success we have achieved. What about the people who have played a significant part in our lives or the situations over which we have had little or no control? There is much in our lives that comes to us as a gift. The true self acknowledges this.

In speaking at Queen Elisabeth’s funeral, an archbishop said that what makes a person memorable is not power or prestige but the service he or she had rendered for the common good. This was true of Queen Elisabeth with hundreds of thousands of people wanting to honor her for her service to her country and to the world. Each person can play their part in the overall benefit for the world. It is in our relationships that we can make our unique contribution.

Jesus wants us to respond to his call to accept and receive the talents of others as well as do our part in building up God’s kingdom. The greatest gift we can give is ourselves. If we have experienced God’s unconditional love and that love has turned into joy, we will make a difference. “They will know we are Christians by our love.”

- What is holding you back from being the person you would like to be?
- Who are the significant people in your life?
- How does your relationship with Jesus affect your feelings about yourself?

O God, help me to be more open in my relationship with you.

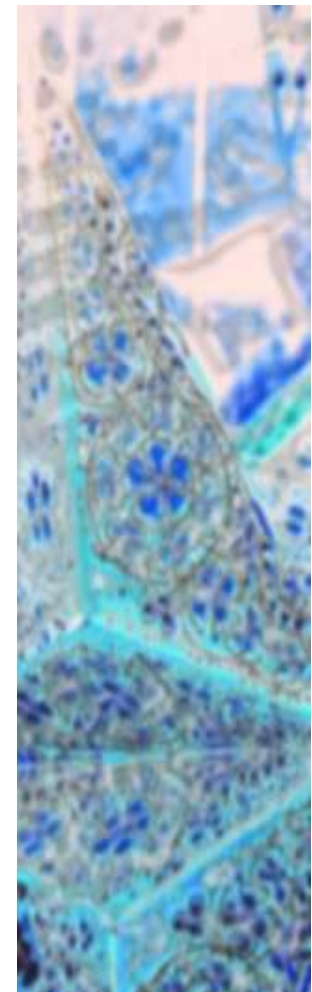
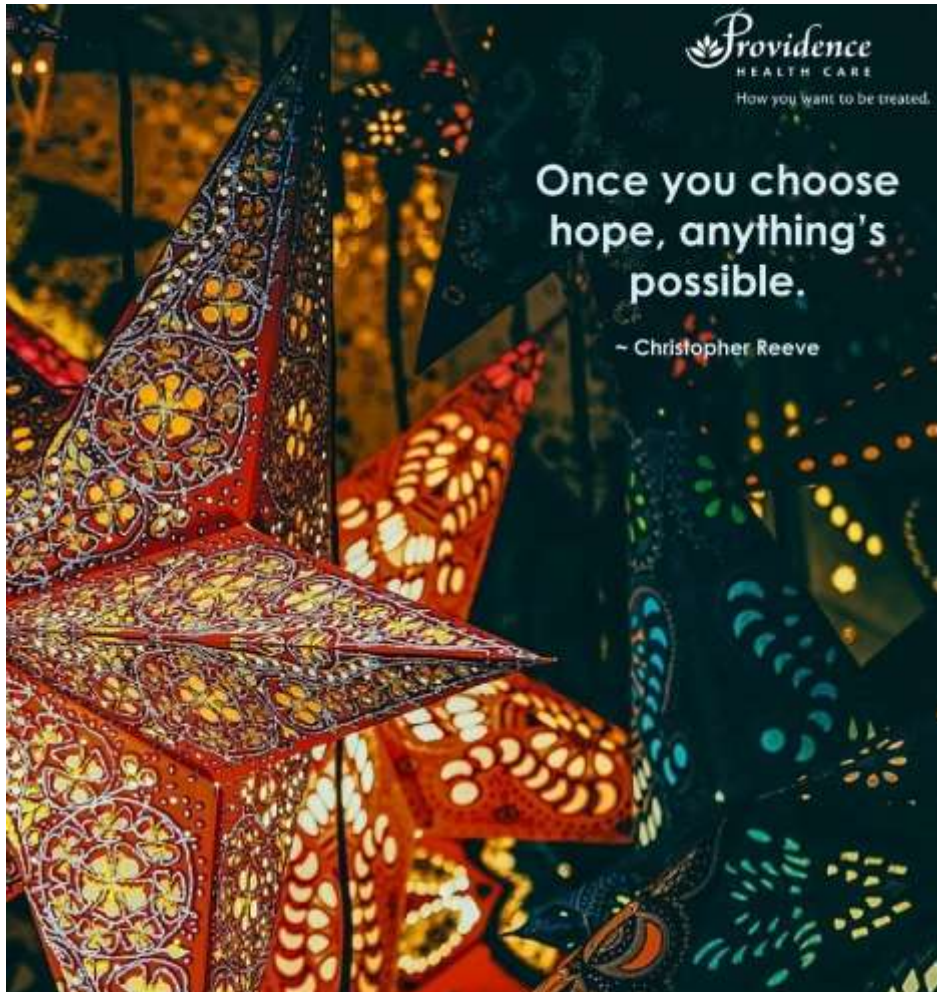
Brother Carl Sternberg, C.S.C.



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



Advent begins on **Sunday, November 27** and lasts for four Sundays leading up to Christmas. The Latin word for “coming,” Advent is a period of self-preparation, prayer, penance and fasting as well as a joyous season in anticipation of celebration of the Nativity of Jesus at Christmas and the return of Jesus at the Second Coming.

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Brother
James
Kane,
CSC



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