

# Homily for Br Dominic C.Ss.R., RIP

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## Homily Preached at Br Dominic's Funeral...

Life of a Redemptorist Brother

Br. Dominic 1912 - 2003

### The Funeral of Brother Dominic

Bishop Eton - 7th August 2003

Preacher: **Very Rev Fr James Casey C.Ss.R.**

In today's first reading St. Paul says "that when the tent that we live in on earth is folded up, there is a house built by God for us." Well, Brother Dominic has, in these last few years been quietly and confidently folding up his tent after a long sojourn here on this earth – nearly ninety-one years of life, seventy-two of which were specifically dedicated to the service of the Lord as a Redemptorist Brother.

It is important to have a good start in life. Brother Dominic did – he was born in Glasgow! What inspired him to enter religious life and what attracted him to the Redemptorist Congregation we will never know. He was still in his teens when he made that decision; and in 1931, when most of us here were only potential people, he gave his life to the Lord - forever.

The religious life that Brother Dominic entered was very different from that of today. Then there was less talk of the risen Christ and more of the suffering Saviour. As a consequence, there was a great emphasis on suffering and sacrifice. It was almost a dogma of faith that anything in life that was unpleasant or even positively painful was good for the soul. That wasn't always true.

And, of course, blind obedience, an ambiguous phrase, was the order of the day. The word "dialogue" hadn't yet been invented. Men were appointed quite arbitrarily to one job or another, from one end of the country to another, or told: "There's a ship leaving Southampton for South Africa in ten days time – be on it, Brother." In the 1930's, when Dominic was a young Brother, the word "stress" pertained principally to engineering and if any religious had mentioned the word "burnout", it would have been presumed that he was talking about blast furnaces.

Life in the Congregation was hard for all candidates, both priests and brothers. But it was particularly hard for the brothers because there was, like it or not, a system of apartheid, a two-tier society, clerical and lay, Fathers and

Brothers. If there was one thing the Brothers learned it was that they, like Jesus Christ, came to serve and not to be served. This the Brothers knew and accepted. But service can so easily be taken for granted, can so easily be exploited. When it is, quite naturally, resentment and bitterness can arise – but so too can the memory of Jesus' words to his squabbling disciples: "Who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves." Is there a higher vocation? Years ago, one of the old Brothers, after calmly recalling some of the hurts of the past told me without rancour or regret: "Somebody has to follow the Christ who was despised."

I say these things not to paint a pessimistic picture of the past, or of the priests for that matter, but to stress the depth of religious conviction that caused young men, like Brother Dominic, to leave home and a loving family, to follow closely the humble tradesman from Nazareth, and, despite the very real hardships, to do so to the end. Doing this would have been more difficult for Dominic than for some others because Dominic was highly intelligent, an independent minded man, talented and well-read. The Times crossword was to Dominic as the game of noughts and crosses is to me!

Only twice in my life did I live in the same community as Dominic. The first time was in Sunderland about twenty years ago. Then he was a portly figure; he was, in the words of the hymn, "serene and certain in his ways." I never saw Dominic rush; he knew who he was and what he had to do and he did it.

Most of Dominic's working life in the Congregation, both in this country and South Africa, was spent in the heat of the kitchen as a cook. However, at Sunderland, he was the porter. As such, no one was more approachable. Everyone who came to our door, and they were legion, was greeted with a quiet smiling civility. Like God, he knew everyone by name, and again like God, he knew what they wanted before they ever asked. The happy memory of Dominic's kindness lives on in Sunderland, where today the parish is celebrating a Requiem Mass in his memory.

As Porter, Dominic received everyone with great courtesy, including and perhaps even especially the men of the road, most of whose mothers were at the point of death in Lerwick in the Shetlands or perhaps it was Land's End. They needed the train fare if ever they were to receive a final maternal blessing. Dominic, it seems to me, had a positive affection for these mendacious mendicants. He never interrupted their stories but listened patiently to the end. In a kindly way, he made it clear that he didn't believe a word they said, but dipping deep into his habit pocket, where rattled around the pound coins, he rewarded each one, I'm sure, according to literary merit.

Dominic was, by and large, a quiet man, comfortable with silence. I never heard him criticise or condemn any member of the community. He was, however, an assiduous observer of human nature and the occasional observation did escape him. Of one priest in the community at the time, who tended to begin Mass rather abruptly, and who shall remain anonymous, he drolly remarked: "Harry is the only priest I've ever known who could make the greeting, "The Lord be with you," sound offensive".

On another occasion, when Fr. Shepherd, as Provincial, came to visit the community at Sunderland with his two consultants, one of whom was an ex-provincial and, in secular terms, a bit of an operator, Dominic announced their arrival in the following manner: "The Shepherd has arrived with his crook and his staff."

Dominic's coming to Bishop Eton was occasioned by a cruel incident in Sunderland. When, yet once more, he opened the door to see how he could serve God's people, he was brutally attacked, knocked to the ground, beaten and robbed. I believe it was deep disappointment, a sadness that people could behave in such a way, rather than the fear of being attacked again, that compelled him to leave the place he loved – to leave the place where he was so greatly loved.

Dominic's last years here in retirement were, as I said, his folding up of his tent, albeit slowly and very neatly. He was thinking more and more of the house built by God for us, and he was genuinely looking forward to going there. He knew, too, with St. Paul, "that to live in the body is to be exiled from the Lord." He really did want to go home. His room, where he spent so much time alone became his departure lounge where he waited for the call. His worldly possessions were few – so he only had hand luggage. From time to time, in the recent past, we thought he was going to leave us, but on more than one occasion his flight was cancelled.

However, Dominic did finally leave us, and he's home now in the bosom of the Father. To get there, he travelled a long and often hard road, but always in the company of the gentle and humble Christ. On his journey, he was sustained by prayer and a tremendous devotion to the Holy Mass, into which he knew were incorporated the sacrifices of his own long life. When last Thursday the Lord said to Dominic, weighed down as he was by years and weakened by ill health, "Come to me all you who labour and are over-burdened and I will give you rest."

Dominic happily dropped everything and went. May he rest in peace.

*Fr. J. Casey C.Ss.R*