

In Memoriam

Father Barry: Priestly and Prayerful

Redemptorist Missionary, Father John Gerard Barry, remembered as a quiet, prayerful and reserved superior, died early Saturday, February 18, 2012 while receiving palliative care close to his religious community in New Smyrna Beach, Florida.

Father Barry was born on October 31, 1921 in Boston, MA and professed his first vows on August 2, 1942. He was ordained a priest on June 20, 1948.



Following his ordination, Father Barry studied classical languages — Greek and Latin — at the Catholic University in Washington, D.C. so that he could begin his priestly ministry at the Redemptorist preparatory college in North East, PA. After teaching there for seven years he was transferred from the Baltimore Province to the Vice-Province of Richmond where he served as an associate parish priest, pastor, and retreat director in several cities including Opa Locka and Tampa, FL; and Newport News, Roanoke, and Hampton, VA.

Father Barry also served as the superior of the Vice-Province of Richmond from 1975 until 1981. He then returned to the Baltimore Province for three years to provide spiritual direction at the Redemptorist retreat house in Tobyhanna, PA.

For the rest of his priesthood, he served, once again, in the Vice-Province in Newnan, Griffin and Fort Oglethorpe, GA; Hilton Head, SC; and in Orlando and New Smyrna Beach, FL.

Although externally he may have appeared to be private, reserved, and even stoic, those who knew Father Barry would more accurately recognize his public demeanor as a reflection of his internal fortitude. His prayer life was not only the backbone of his priesthood and the foundation of his faith but also the source of his emotional strength, even from an early age. His father died when John was only two years old, leaving his mother to raise him and his five siblings by herself. And before he completed his preparatory education at North East, PA he was called home during his fifth academic because his mother also passed away.

His deep spiritual life gave him the courage to continue his vocation with the Redemptorists at Ilchester, MD where he met his Novice Master, Father Gunn, who, coincidentally, was the same priest who had baptized John many years earlier when John was only two weeks old, at the Mission Church in Boston.

“He handled a lot of the administrative work himself,” recalls his consultor, Father Vincent Douglass, “because he never wanted to burden anyone. He was a great man, a prayerful man, and a very holy priest who touched a lot of people, young and old alike. He was certainly one of the most affable, kind and gentle persons I’ve ever

known.”

Father Edward Gray, another co-administrator with Father Barry, said, “He was always extremely considerate and if he failed at all, he failed on the side of being cautious. In his heart, he always wanted to do the best thing for the confreres. His temperament was mild which made him very easy to work with. And it goes without saying that the people loved him; they know; people can tell when they meet a person of depth and that was certainly Father John — a man of spiritual depth.”

A similar sentiment came from his fellow parish priest, Father Frank Nelson who added, “I’m amazed at how devoted the people were to him; people not only from the parish here in New Smyrna where he was most recently stationed, but the phone calls we’ve been receiving from Opa Locka, Hilton Head, just about every place he was ever stationed and from many years ago. They recognize the greatness of this man. They know. The people know.”

Few people knew the humorous side of Father Barry. He was not a comedian by any stretch of the imagination, but he had his moments. Once when he was exiting from a dinner at a Red Lobster Restaurant on International Drive in Orlando he noticed a man standing near the entrance with two colorful Macaws and a Polaroid camera. When Father Barry asked what he was doing, the man explained that he posed his parrots on the shoulders of tourists and snapped their photo for a small fee.

“But I haven’t had a priest pose with them before,” the man winked. “Okay, I want my picture taken with them,” replied Father Barry. With one bird nestled in his palm and the other perched proudly on his shoulder, the shutter caught the historic moment on film of a colorful parrot tilting its beak just inches away from Father John’s ear. “It looks like my bird is going to confession,” remarked the keeper. “I can’t repeat what I heard,” quipped Father Barry. “I’m bound by the seal of secrecy.”

Although he may not have been as naturally interactive as Francis of Assisi, Father Barry was certainly steeped in the saintly model of gentle kindness and priestly prayer. May his soul and all the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen