

In Memoriam

Rev. Gribbon, former missionary, dies at 77

One of six children of Michael and Helen Breslin Gribbon, he was a native of Brooklyn, born Nov. 30, 1929. He was raised in Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish and, after one year at Power Memorial High School, he applied to and was accepted at the Redemptorists's St. Mary's Seminary in North East, PA. He made his first profession of vows in 1951 and his final profession three years later. He completed his studies for the priesthood at Mount St. Alphonsus in Esopus, NY, and was ordained to the priesthood June 17, 1956.

Father Gribbon's first assignment was to Bella Vista, Paraguay, where he served for one year. From 1959-61, he was appointed to Pedro Juan Caballero and then, for the next two years, he taught at the seminary in Ponta Grossa. He returned to Pedro Juan Caballero in 1963, serving there until 1967.

Father Charles Brinkmann, a classmate who also served in Paraguay, noted that Father Gribbon was not a sportsman and his horse once returned to the stables at Esopus long before he did. "Let's say, he was no Eddie Arcaro," Father Brinkmann said, referring to a famed jockey. "But he never shirked any work and he was always ready for campos trips by horseback."

In the seminary, Father Brinkmann was responsible for teaching Father Gribbon how to drive, but the latter was not his star pupil, having once tried to ford a river in Paraguay and gotten himself and his Jeep™ stuck in the middle until a team of oxen came to the rescue.

Father Karl Aschmann recalled those early days in Paraguay with Father Gribbon: "He could be very joyful, the life of the party. All you had to do to get him to start a songfest was to ask him for his favorite, 'On Top of Old Smoky.'" Father Brinkmann recalled some of the same experiences: "In the first years of our priesthood, he was a happy, fun guy, a great delight to be with."

Missionary life in the 1950s and '60s was full of great challenges and few luxuries, but led to a great camaraderie, Father Aschmann said. "It was a life of trusting and pulling together and confrere filling in for confrere," he explained. Father Gribbon "did fine work for the poor and he was a good priest," he added.

Father Gribbon returned to the United States in 1967, assigned to teach Spanish to the seminarians at North East. In the fall of 1970, he was assigned to St. Boniface Church in Philadelphia and, two years later, he went as rector to Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Seaford, DE. He served at Immaculate Conception Church in the Bronx in 1975-76.

In 1976, Father Gribbon joined the band of Redemptorists laboring in the Vice Province of Richmond, extending from Virginia down to Florida. He served in Tampa, FL, for 11 years and then in Ft. Oglethorpe, GA for three years. In 1991, he was assigned to Holy Family Retreat House in Hampton, VA. Father Brinkmann joined up again with his classmate in their work here. "He was great on retreats," Father Brinkmann said. "He found he liked the work and he was very good at it. The retreatants loved him and he was a terrific confessor, very patient and kind."

Physical infirmities began to set in, starting with a loss of hearing, and sickness "dampened his laughter and his spirits," Father Brinkmann said. "The hearing problem was hard on him because he could sit with people and be out of touch with what was going on. It was very depressing for him not to be in with everyone." Father Gribbon also developed diabetes, underwent knee replacements which did not turn out as well as expected, problems with his feet which necessitated the amputations of some toes, and loss of his sight.



Although his laughter disappeared, his faith did not. Father Brinkmann remembered one time at the retreat house when the two of them were preparing the sacristy for the next Mass. "He kissed each host as he counted them out and I asked him what that was all about," Father Brinkmann said. "He told me he wanted a kiss to be waiting for Jesus when the host became His Body. He had a tremendous love and reverence for the Eucharist." During retreats, he added, Father Gribbon would join the people in Eucharistic adoration and he always led them in praying the rosary and the Stations of the Cross.

In late 1997, Father Gribbon was transferred to Hapeville, GA; in 1999, in failing health, he was assigned to St. Alphonsus Villa in New Smyrna Beach, FL. "Even when he went to the Villa, people corresponded with him because he was very sympathetic and a good listener," said Father Brinkmann. Father Gribbon moved to St. John Neumann Residence in 2004.

One of his nephews, Father Michael Gribbon, a priest of the Diocese of Brooklyn, said that he and his 18 cousins did not get to see much of their uncle because of his missionary work. "I do remember seeing him off on a boat with great admiration for how he was serving the poor and bringing them the Gospel. We all looked up to him," he said. Whenever the senior Father Gribbon did get home, there was always a big family gathering to welcome him, he added. Last year, the family gathered at Saratoga Springs to join in the Redemptorists's annual jubilee celebration. "It was his 50th anniversary and it was great to honor him. It was a good time for the family, too, since it was also my 25th anniversary. It was wonderful to see my uncle, to know that even though he had had a stroke, he was still appreciated and valued by the Redemptorists."

In addition to the nieces, nephews, grandnieces and grandnephews, Father Gribbon is survived by a sister, Regina Mooney, of Bellvale, NY. He is predeceased by his brothers John (Brother Xavier, C.S.S.R.), Hugh and Michael, and a sister, Mary (Sister St. Jerome, C.S.J.).