

In Memoriam

Father Pierce Kenny: Priestly Dignity with a Common Touch

Redemptorist missionary, Father Pierce John Kenny, remembered as a dignified priest who never lost the common touch, died on June 25, 2012 at St. Joseph's Hospital in Towson, MD under the care of his religious confreres at St. John Neumann Residence, Stella Maris in Timonium.

Father Kenny was born on November 28, 1943 in Brooklyn, New York, professed his first vows as a Redemptorist on August 2, 1963, and was ordained a priest on June 22, 1969.



After graduating from the Redemptorist Preparatory Seminary in North East, PA in 1962, he made his novitiate year in Ilchester, MD, and received his B.A. in philosophy from St. Alphonsus College in Suffield, CT in 1966. After completing his graduate studies in theology at Mount Saint Alphonsus Seminary in Esopus, NY, Father Kenny served on the foreign missions in South America at Telemaco Borba, Parana and Bela Vista.

He returned to the Baltimore Province as vocation director from 1974 until 1978 and was then appointed to St. Gerard's parish in Lima, Ohio. The following year he returned to the then Vice-Province of Campo Grande where he worked for six more years in Ponta Grossa and Paranagua. June, 1986 found him stateside once again in Brooklyn for a year and then for the next five years at St. Clement's Mission House in Ephrata, PA.

In 1992 he was transferred to St. Clement's Parish in upstate New York at Saratoga Springs where he served until June 15, 1998 when he returned for the final time to his hometown. He remained a member of the OLPH community in Brooklyn until his death fourteen years later.

"When we were in the seminary, I remember him as a terrific athlete," states his classmate, Father Gordon Cannoles. "He played all sports and was really good at them. Of course he was adept at studies, but I believe his real strength was his community spirit which he carried with him to the foreign missions. For example, I was assigned to Paraguay, just across the river from Pierce, when he was stationed in Brazil. In those days there were no Masses on Sunday evening so both communities would get together for a meal and a card game and to chat about the ministry. He could have watched TV but Pierce preferred to spend time with the confreres and this was the spirit that kept us all going. You have to understand that we were in the boondocks, so these community get-togethers became a real lifeline for us. I will always be grateful for his presence and joyful spirit at a time when our ministry was a physical challenge and we were all so far away from home."

Father Pat Lynch, another classmate, agrees. "When I think of my contact with Pierce, first in the seminary and later in Lima, Ohio — we went there as a new team — the word 'community' comes to mind immediately. Pierce always had a great community attitude: 'let's get the men together, especially around a good meal or soiree.' He was easy to be with and also down to earth: No frills. What you see is what you get. This is what attracted many people to him, especially the very ordinary people. Whether he was in Brazil or in the States, Pierce was likable

and approachable and at the same time, respected. However, he also had a lighter side and I always enjoyed his unique sense of humor. He did things that were quietly funny. I recall a time in Lima when we went to an appreciation party for the Bingo workers. This was a dinner-dance and some of the couples were really expert ballroom dancers. Well, right in the middle of this elegant music, Pierce stands up and, with a very dignified demeanor, starts dancing by himself. Some of the ladies tried to hook up with him, but he was in a dancing world of his own. Can you picture him in his clerical suit, a bit on the pudgy side, making these hilarious dance moves but with a serious look on his face? We couldn't stop laughing. He could appear distinguished and still not take himself too seriously."

A third classmate, Father Kevin Moley, who was also his local superior and his provincial superior says, "Father Pierce was certainly one of the most popular men in our class. During our graduate studies in theology at the Mount, we team-taught a religion course at Presentation parish in Port Ewen, NY. I handled the preparatory materials and he fielded the question-and-answer periods. He was always pleasant, outgoing, and the type of confrere who loved community life, loved a good party, and was always willing to help in any way he could. I also believe that this is why illness was so unkind to him. Sickness took a real toll on him toward the end. Why? Because poor health prevented him from doing the ministerial and communal activities that he loved. But those of us who really knew him, remember the priest who could carry himself with dignity while never losing the common touch."