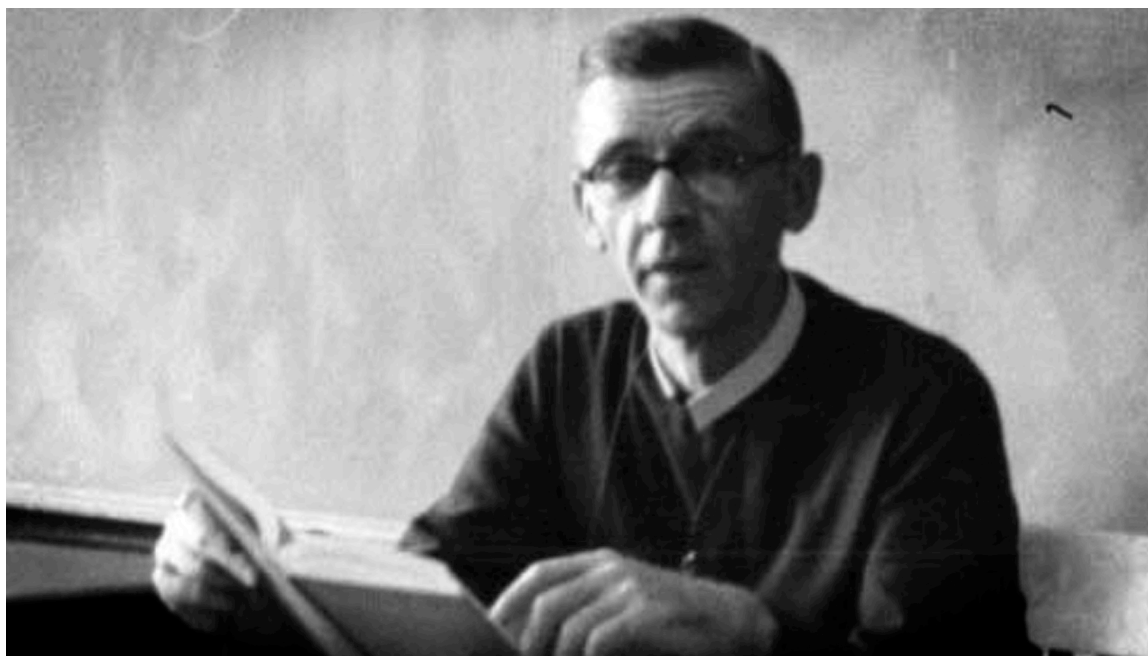


Remember Brother Peter Kelly, C.F.X.



This article was originally published in a series of reflections based on the lives of Xaverian Brothers who have played influential roles in the life and development of the Congregation in America. They are written in commemoration of the Xaverian Brothers 150th Anniversary of their arrival in America in 1854.

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As the Xaverian Brothers celebrate one hundred and fifty years of service to the Church in the United States, it is good to take time to share with one another, with our families and friends, with our colleagues in ministry, as well as, with those to whom we have ministered, reflections on the lives of Brothers who have brought us this far. Such reflections, I believe, are not intended to nostalgize our past but rather to inspire in all of us the faith, trust and zeal needed to make Christ visible, accessible and active in the Church and world today and tomorrow.

Faithfulness is Brothers Peter Kelly's signature gift to the Xaverian Brothers and to the Church. Throughout his seventy years as a Xaverian, Peter's faithfulness was forged in the fire of daily experiences that helped him to understand gradually that all disciples are called to abandon themselves to God and to find spiritual freedom in doing so. Our *Fundamental Principles* exhort the following:

If you allow yourself to be formed by God through the common, ordinary, unspectacular flow of everyday life, you will gradually experience a liberation and freedom never before imagined.

Peter's life was filled with "common, ordinary and unspectacular." He was never a superior or a principal. Many were influenced, however, by Peter's simply being "brother" to them. Perhaps an image will help color these words.

As a junior at Xaverian High School in Brooklyn, I can remember one day at the beginning of the school year, an unusually noisy gathering of students at the change of classes. Brother George Francis was the disciplinarian. His edict was that we walk to the right of the red line in the middle of the corridor and be silent between classes. Any noisy gathering of students talking and laughing was simply not imaginable! In the midst of the students was Brother Ramon whom the students were calling with affection, "Mon ami, Mon ami." One could hear Peter saying with no great command in his voice, "My God, my God, you have to go to class." The students were simply glad to see their "mon ami" as Peter was to see them.

Peter taught French. In a certain way Peter captured the openness, curiosity and insightfulness of Saint Exupery's *Little Prince* in his quest for the meaning of life, love and friendship. Like the Little Prince, Peter realized that his real call as a *brother*, teacher and advocate of the poor and oppressed was to behold the common, ordinary and unspectacular of life and "to see with the heart, for what is essential is often invisible to the eyes." "Seeing with the heart" is how Peter ministered "God's healing touch of love" to all whom he met in his sixty-five year journey of ministry which began in 1937 at Saint Mary's Industrial Home in Baltimore and ended with his death in 2002 at Transfiguration parish in Brooklyn. Peter was a *brother* who saw with his heart.

Peter's faithfulness to God's call fostered in him "attitude of openness to the needs of the Church and the world and (the) willingness to follow Christ where He leads" (FP). In the 1960's the Spirit was filling the Church and world with youthful idealism and a fresh awareness of the need for social justice and peace. Peter was moved by the Spirit. He felt more and more called to direct ministry to the poor and oppressed.

Peter was a man of courage. He took a clear stand on behalf of the poor, especially undocumented Hispanics. He stood up for his beliefs often questioning what we as a congregation, and in particular, our schools, were doing to reach out to the poor. Sometimes his questions and comments were heated. At times Peter offended. At times Peter was offended. In all cases, however, Peter was faithful to his call as a *brother* "to a life of constant searching" (FP). Peter's search would eventually lead him to Williamsburg, Brooklyn where he would spend the majority of his twenty-eight years there with Father Brian Karvalis at Transfiguration Parish.

Just a short visit to Marcy Avenue was enough to tell that Peter was truly in love with the service of God in this Hispanic community. From watching and listening to Peter, it was apparent that he was their advocate and their teacher. Observing them, it was evident that Peter was their *brother*. Perhaps another image will

make what I am saying clearer.

Arthur and I went with Peter to an Easter Vigil service. Peter had been asked to be the *padrino* of a young man named Aristides. When it came time for the baptism and confirmation, Peter needed help getting to the sanctuary and Arthur and I helped. The scene was utter chaos. About a dozen young Hispanics were being baptized. In the confusion of who was or was not in the ceremony, *Pedrito* became *padrino* to nearly everyone being baptized. Arthur and I became Aristides' auxiliary *padrinos*. The affection the people had for Peter was a testimony to his life in the Spirit.

During these years, Peter came to realize that “the cost of his desire to follow Christ, the poor man,” would be his very life. In the many conversations I shared with him, Peter was haunted with the question of whether he was doing God's will. I tried to reassure him by telling him that the doubts he was having were from the devil. We would laugh.

Peter's ministry became more and more one of presence. It was a ministry grounded in his own being present and available to God, especially through his practice of solitude, contemplative prayer and Eucharistic adoration. Peter was deeply influenced by the witness and generous spirit of Dorothy Day and Charles de Faucould. For me Peter was a living example of what our chapter calls to contemplative stance and mission among the poor and marginalize are about.

Saint, holy, alive to the times, poor, humorous, prayerful, honest, brother, stubborn, a good community man, intense. These are words that Brothers shared when asked what one word comes to mind when you think of Peter Kelly. To those words, I add faithful servant. Peter's life, I feel, continues to teach us a lesson that, while simple and clear, takes a lifetime to learn. It comes from a prayer Peter said daily during his Eucharistic adoration.

Into your hands I commend my soul;
I offer it to you with all the love of my heart,
for I love you Lord, and so need to give
myself into your hands, without reserve,
and with boundless confidence,
for you are my Father.

-Charles de Faucould

In his life of following Christ, Peter allowed himself “to be given away, together with his brothers, as nourishment for others, as bread that is broken” (FP). For Peter's gift of faithfulness, we give thanks. For showing us what it means to be *brother*, we are, indeed, grateful.

We invite you to reflect on Brother Peter's story and consider leaving a comment about someone (a Brother, a colleague, a friend) who embodies

similar qualities to Brother Peter Kelly. Share with us that individual's special qualities, so that as a community we can share in your gratitude!