

In Memoriam:

Brother Peter Fitzpatrick, C.F.X. (Brother Benedict)

1928-2020

Nothing is more practical than finding God, nothing is more practical

Than falling in Love in a quite absolute, final way.

What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination,

Will affect everything.

Pedro Arrupe, SJ (1907-1991)

Brother Peter Fitzpatrick found God. Those who knew him well, know he was in love with God. Peter's love of God grew to be absolute. His love of life seized his imagination. Peter's love affected his relationships and everything he did.

Peter entered eternal life peacefully at nine o'clock in the evening of November 21st. He was ninety-two years old. He had just celebrated his seventy-fifth anniversary as a Xaverian. Let's celebrate Peter's life—the moments he shared, the words he spoke (and there were many!) We will discover once again just how unique Peter is.

Peter was born in Brooklyn, New York to Anna and Michael Fitzpatrick, Irish immigrants. He had two sisters, Mary and Anna and three brothers, John, Michael and Thomas. It was always with great affection that Peter spoke of his parents and siblings as well as family members living in Ireland. His family was his first novitiate. Mother and father formed him in the unconditional love of God where he learned simplicity, compassion, honesty, hope, loyalty to others and confidence in himself.

Peter first met the Xaverian Brothers at Saint Teresa of Avila Elementary School on Sterling Place.

Twenty-four of his fellow Xaverians would also enter the Congregation from Saint Teresa's. Upon graduation from St. Augustine High School in 1945, Peter responded to the initial call to 'live a life of love in faith and trust, as a disciple of Jesus in the Congregation of the Brothers of Saint Francis Xavier.(FP)' On September 19, 1945 he entered Sacred Heart Novitiate, Fort Monroe, Virginia. He received the Xaverian habit and religious name, Benedict, on the Feast of Saint Joseph in 1946. After novitiate, Peter continued his formation at Xaverian College earning his BA in English in 1951 from Catholic University of America.

As Pedro Arrupe notes, what Peter was in love with, what seized his imagination would shape his life for the next seventy-five years. In a book titled *How Shall I Live Knowing I Will Die?*, Wayne Muller suggests that it is usually a serious illness or the challenges of aging or some other life event that invites us to ask vital questions such as: What is my life really about? What (or whom) do I love? What (or whom) do I place at the center of my life? Knowing the limited time I have left, what will I do with my days? For Peter these were not end-of-life questions. They were questions that guided his spiritual development. His would be a life-long search for God; a continual falling in love with life that would shape who he is.

Peter's first mission was Saint Xavier in Louisville where we get glimpses of his answers to the

question, 'What do I love?' Peter loved learning, literature and especially poetry. He loved the art of teaching, having taught both English and algebra. We also discover whom he loved. He loved his students. He loved seeing young people grow, mature and learn. He loved teaching them. He loved challenging them to reach their potential. He could be understanding. He could also be very strict. There is no doubt that Peter heeded our Xaverian Rule that exhorted us "to unite suaviter in modo with fortiter in re." (Gentleness in manner with strength in action.) [VII, 20, 1954] It is evident that he also heeded the exhortation, "In imitation of Jesus, devote yourself heart and soul to the best interests of your pupils." [VII, 12, 1954] Many students who had 'Benedict' still sing his praises as a brilliant and caring teacher. They enjoyed his friendship as adults.

From 1957 to 1959 Peter would teach at Xaverian College in Brighton, England and then return to the U.S. where from 1959 to 1966 he taught at Mount Saint Joseph in Baltimore and was also Assistant Principal. A lifelong learner, Peter would study at the University of Maryland, Johns Hopkins and earn his Masters from Catholic University 1965. From 1966 to 1969 Peter was back in England helping with the formation program.

Peter's leadership was readily recognized. He spent several years in congregational positions. In the former American Central Province he served as Assistant to the Provincial. He served as Vicar General and later as Provincial of the American Central Province. I asked Brother Cornelius Hubbuch, a dear friend of Peter, to capture Peter's spirit for me. Brother Cornelius notes, "Peter had a great ability and willingness to deal with challenges and difficulties. He never turned away. He was courageous leader." Then I asked Brother Cornelius, "But what was Peter's life about?" Without hesitation, Brother Cornelius said, "Peter loved being a Xaverian Brother, and he loved the Brothers. He was completely devoted to his friends and he had many."

From 1977 to 1982 Peter studied spirituality at Regis College in Toronto, earning a Master's in Spirituality. He also served on their spirituality team. Peter's study of Ignatian Spirituality at Regis deepened his love of God, captured his imagination and affected everything he was doing. We would benefit from his studies at Regis.

Peter believed strongly that our growth as spiritual persons was integrally connected to our psychological and emotional development. As Provincial (1982-1988) he promoted intentional communities where we could share more easily our lives with each other in light of the Fundamental Principles. He initiated Area Meetings to help us share responsibility for our way of life. He helped us understand in a more personal way the deeper meaning of the Founder's charism. I asked Brother Michael McCarthy who worked with him, "What did Peter place at the center of his life?" Immediately Brother Michael said, "His unabashed love of God." We got a glimpse of that love at an Area Meeting. Peter raised the question, "Are we dying?" Then we spent time exploring his real question, "Are we really living the way our Founder wants us to live?" While referencing the Founder's conversion, Peter became very emotional sharing his own experience—the moment he felt in his heart that God knew him, understood him and loved him just as he is. Ryken's words, 'God is not obliged to give an account to anybody even if he wants to use a sinner (FP)' became Peter's. Are we living with the conviction of

God's love for us?

Peter recognized also that the love of God calls us to continual conversion. Peter could lose patience and used sharp words with others. He was very aware of this fault and would readily admit his error and apologize to the individual. Such occasions called him to greater humility and compassion.

An Irish author, Kevin Toolis, in his book, *My Father's Wake, How the Irish Teach Us to Live, Love and Die,* makes a statement that takes awhile to grasp. "The dead belong to those who loved them." (265)

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At Ryken House, Peter 'kept falling in love' as Pedro Arrupe notes in his prayer. It was Peter's love of God that decided his life. Let me end with the second part of Pedro Arrupe's prayer. You can fill in Peter's favorite activities—quiet meditation in chapel, long breakfasts, table conversations, watching movies, writing letters, See's chocolates, reading, storytelling, talking on the phone, etc.

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What will get you out of bed in the morning,

What you do with your evenings,

How you spend your weekends,

What you read, whom you know,

What breaks your heart,

What amazes you with joy and gratitude.

I am sure Peter would join Pedro Arrupe in saying to us, "Fall in Love, stay in love, and it will decide everything."

May Peter enjoy the fullness of God's love.

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