

Fr. Dayton David KIRBY 81 USA

* Aug. 17, 1910, Eagle Point, WI + Feb. 29, 1992, Chippewa Falls, WI

He graduated with high grades from McDonnell Memorial High School in 1928 and then did not know what he wanted to become. For five years he worked in restaurants, where his cooking expertise soon drew customers; he also learned how to build airplanes, thereby improving his mechanical skills.

Then Fr. James McGurk, the pastor of Notre Dame, Chippewa Falls, had a good talk with him and directed his thoughts to becoming a priest and missionary in the Congregation. All the time Davey, as he was called, had maintained an inner life in which he was on intimate terms with the Good Lord and conversed freely with Jesus. Thus, Father's invitation fell on fertile soil, and, as Davey himself later related, he heard God telling him: "Davey boy, I want you as a priest."

He was 23 years old when he entered Cornwells as a junior college student in 1933. Some doubt was raised about his chance of success in the classroom after an absence of five years from it. But "Davey boy" showed his mettle and two years later he could enter the novitiate. Professed at Ridgefield, CT, August 15, 1936, he studied philosophy in Ferndale, CT, where he was ordained a priest June 20, 1941.

The following year he received his first assignment as assistant pastor at St. Mark's in New York's Harlem section, where he worked zealously for six years among African-Americans. Ministry among these people became his work of preference, and in 1948 he became pastor of a similar but rural parish in Salisbury, NC.

He had barely built a church and rectory for this pioneering mission in the "Bible Belt", when his ministry took a different direction:

in 1951, the Provincial appointed him to supervise the building of a new junior seminary at Ann Arbor, MI. Once the construction was finished, he became its superior. As such, he was highly regarded by the community, and the young students showed their spontaneous attraction by authentic holiness by flocking to him for confessions and direction.

When his term as superior came to an end in 1958, he became pastor of St. Catherine's, Riverside, CA, for six years, followed by the same position in St. John's, Fort Smith, AR, at Our lady of Lourdes, Abbeville, LA, 1968, and at St. Paul's, Lafayette, LA, 1970. In the last three of these parishes he could again serve his beloved African-Americans.

In 1975 his talents as a spiritual director were again called upon when he was appointed novice-master in Glenwood Spings, CO. It lasted only one year, for then the North American provinces opened a combined novitiate for all their candidates in Ferndale. No longer in the best of health, Father Kirby could resume his pastoral ministry among the people, first at Our Lady of the Valley, Hemet, CA, then in 1982 at St. Joseph's, Conway, AR. In both places he served as an associate pastor.

A stroke suffered while he was attending a retreat, forced him to retire in 1986. At his family's insistence, he consented to enter the Golden Age Home in Wisconsin, where they could personally take care of him. Active in ministry within the house till the end, he celebrated the golden jubilee of his priesthood there in 1991.

In mid-February 1992 he told his family, just before celebrating Mass for them, that Our Lord had come to visit him last night and told him: "Davey boy, I am coming to take you home. I have a place ready for you." But, Father added, "Yes, we will have time for cookies and coffee after

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Mass; Our Lord is not coming that soon". He died two weeks later in St. Joseph's Hospital, Chippewa Falls. Interment took place at the O'Neil Creek Cemetery, in his birthplace.

Throughout his life his simple but radiant holiness touched all who come in touch with him. "What a privilege it was...to have (him) serve for some time in our diocese," wrote Bishop Andrew J. McDonald of Little Rock, AR. "He was truly a saint," testified others. And within the Congregation Fathers John Rondeau and Albert McKnight acknowledged how influential his word and example had been in the years they were discerning their vocation as Holy Ghost Fathers.

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