

A GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT

Last week, we received word that Father Kevin O'Reilly died suddenly and unexpectedly. Father O'Reilly was the Academic Dean and professor of Dogmatic Theology at St. Joseph Seminary in Yonkers. Kevin had a massive heart attack as he delivered groceries to an elderly couple. I suppose, with a big snowstorm coming, he had worried about them.

He was just 51 years old, and ordained in 1996, two years after I was in 1994; we were at Dunwoodie together from 1992 to 1994. Kevin was a very smart man, a graduate of Columbia University, and though I didn't know his parents, I would say faith must have been very important to them. His brother Dan was ordained to the priesthood a few years later as well. If the sentiment common among our young people was his - that we should become the best possible "version" of ourselves as possible - then, Kevin knew that would mean answering the Lord's invitation to follow Him as a priest.

He did very important work in the seminary in preparing young men for the Catholic priesthood and laymen for the diaconate. He was there nearly twenty years, having had to ready these future priests for the very challenging times ahead. Pastoral care, with so many fewer priests, would be far harder work; the administration of parishes much more complicated; and evangelization, in the midst of a secular and anti-religious culture, exhausting. He had a grave responsibility entrusted to him, for though priests are considered, by our secular state and in prevailing opinion, to be non-essential, the task they are given - the care of the soul - is the most

vital. Such would be their motivation in ensuring the continued celebration of Mass during this COVID19 pandemic, their visits to the sick, and the formation in faith of families. Kevin helped out with Mass on Sundays at St. Eugene Church in Yonkers.

All of this was an afterthought, however, when I heard how Kevin had died. The picture of him carrying bags of groceries to an older couple in need reminded me of St. John Neumann, who died of exposure to the cold to provide a newly ordained priest with a chalice to celebrate his first Mass. It made me think of the woman who, in carrying her grocery bags into her parish church while making a visit during the weekday, inspired Edith Stein to become a Catholic and a Carmelite sister, and a martyr for the faith (St. Theresa Benedicta was killed in Auschwitz.). While we may take courage from the acts of the martyrs, we should observe that faith is most often evinced in small acts that seem mundane.

We need more priests like Father O'Reilly and thus Jesus's command to pray the Harvest Master send workers into the harvest is urgent. How important and effective your prayers are for the priests who serve you, from the parish, to the diocese and the missions, to the Holy See! Will you continue to pray for myself, Father John and Father Bob, Deacon Len, Deacon Tony, Deacon Joe, and Deacon John, and for our seminarians, Anthony Maxson and Sal Somma, and our diaconate candidate, Pete McGovern that we may be faithful in small things as well as great, and prove to be good and faithful servants?