

(September 24, 1915 - August 26, 1987)

Born in Victoriaville-D'Arthabaska, Canada, Brother Xavier Leonard entered St. Joseph's Juniorate in Tyngsboro, Massachusetts in 1931. His investiture took place in 1935 and he completed his Scholasticate at St. Ann's in Poughkeepsie, New York. He made the vow of stability in 1965. While Xavier Leonard spent the past thirty years at Central Catholic High School in Lawrence, Massachusetts, he also taught in Manchester, New Hampshire; Wheeling, West Virginia; Lowell, Massachusetts; and New York City. He died suddenly on August 26, 1987 in Lawrence, Massachusetts the night before he was to move to Miami, Florida.

Brother Thomas Petite delivered the eulogy at St. Anne Church, Lawrence, Massachusetts.

This morning's liturgy is both a reflection of Brother Xavier Leonard's life and in some ways a contradiction to the way he lived his religious life as a Marist Brother. The hymns, prayers, and readings of the liturgy point to resurrection hope which is the foundation and core of our Christian belief. Since the triumph of Jesus we are called not to fear death but rather to embrace it as a freeing, completing force. In this Liturgy of Christian Burial the church calls us to summon up from the very depths of our souls the faith to say, "Come, Lord Jesus, we do believe!"

Yes, we do believe that Jesus calls each of us to something greater than what we experience here and now in this life. We believe that there is a state, an actual state and not a philosophical notion, that awaits us where there are no tears, no pain, and no sighing. We believe that death does not end relationships with family and friends, but rather through the resurrection of Jesus, calls them to greater intensity and happiness. We believe that Jesus will come again and on that day all the living and the dead will be united before the Lord in glory and peace. All this and more we believe as we gather today amidst the tears of human separation and the joy of a believing community.

All this hope, this anticipation, this joy is what the vowed religious life is all about. Religious community life does not and in many ways could never hope to replace the intimacies of family life. Rather, the vowed individual is called to bring his or her uniqueness to a joint living experience in community and within the Church so that the depth and breadth of Christ's love can be manifested to all people. This is what Brother Leonard's life was all about. The symbolism present in today's liturgy --- incense, processions, gold chalices, and even this beautiful church --- in some ways would make him feel uncomfortable and out of place.

I was home visiting my mother at the beach along the New Jersey Shore when Brother Ernest Beland called to tell me of Brother Leonard's death. That afternoon as I walked along the beach, common everyday items stood out more than usual. The soothing sound of the surf on the shore, the gentle flight of a kite held by a fragile string in a child's hand, the gliding on air currents of gulls and sandpipers, the refreshing ocean spray carried by a gentle sea breeze, the laughter of children as they built castles in the sand and toyed with a baby blue-claw crab were all sights and sounds that I had experienced hundreds of times since my childhood, but in the wake of Brother Ernest's call, they took on new meaning. Written across

all these experiences was the word simplicity! Not only the simplicity of everyday summer occurrences at the beach, but the simplicity of Brother Leonard's life. Simplicity was the gift he brought to our community and to the Church. Perhaps for this reason the Lord Jesus called him to be a Marist Brother rather than a member of any other religious congregation.

From the earliest days of the Congregation, the Founder of the Marist Brothers, Blessed Marcellin Champagnat, emphasized the virtue of simplicity. To be simple and humble in service, life style, and acceptance of God's will were to be characteristics in the life of a Brother in our community. Even the original name that the Founder gave our Congregation, the Little Brothers of Mary, emphasized this humble spirit. To be little is to be unknown and hidden in today's society, to be powerless, taken for granted, and in many cases, put down and broken. Society, both secular and even religious, says, "What a waste. There is so much to do: structures have to be changed, institutions confronted, life enjoyed and lived to the fullest. It's a sin to waste life in the shadows."

In many ways Brother Leonard lived his life in the shadows for fifty- two years as a Little Brother of Mary. He was never a superior, never a school administrator, never chaired or was even a member of any province committee, and he was never a provincial chapter delegate. However, he did work as a laborer on summer construction projects that helped to build Central Catholic High School in Lawrence and Marist College in Poughkeepsie, New York. He worked with young children at our summer camps. He taught classes in several different schools and often had the most difficult students. While most teaching brothers and lay teachers were finishing summer vacations, Brother Leonard was at football camp taking pictures for the Fall football program. At an age when many people retire and relax, Brother Leonard resurrected the high school photography club because, in his words, "a few of the boys wanted it." When he finally retired from school work he became the handyman at the Brothers' Queen of Peace Community here in Lawrence. The community often joked that Brother Paul's list of things for Leonard to do, if broken down into class periods, would equal fourteen class preparations. He seemed always to take up each task in an unassuming and meaningful way. Without words. he gave the impression that each job was his way of serving the Brothers. Whether it was cutting a Brother's hair, buying the daily Tribune for the community, picking up a Brother at the airport or climbing a twelve-foot ladder to change a fluorescent light bulb in the community room, he did all in a spirit of service.

Those of us who lived with Leonard will never forget how neat and orderly he was. For me Leonard's identifying mark in the kingdom of the saints will be cleaning off tables, brushing crumbs from counter tops, and folding napkins. "A place for everything and everything in its place" was his motto. Perhaps it is not coincidental that on the night before he died he had all his earthly possessions packaged and labeled for his trip with Brother Alcide and Brother Timothy to his new assignment in Miami.

Brother Leonard loved his God, his family (he was always speaking of his brothers and sisters, nieces, nephews, grand and great nieces and nephews), his Marist Brothers, the people of Lawrence and Central Catholic High School. The closing of the Marist Brothers' Queen of Peace Community in Lawrence and the possible move of Central Catholic High School from Lawrence caused him pain and confusion. In spite of this, he willingly accepted Brother Provincial's invitation to join the Brothers' community in Miami. His response was, "If I can help out, then I'll

be happy to go." However, the Lord Jesus granted Brother Leonard his wish to die in Lawrence and so on Wednesday, August 27, the day he was to leave Lawrence for Miami, Leonard returned home to the Lord where there are no unanswered questions and where the simple and humble will be welcomed and exalted.

The French spiritual author Leon Bloy has written that "every Christian has within his grasp the power to become a saint. All he must do is to simply live his life in the daily call to be himself with the gifts that God has given him and in the place the Lord has put him."

Today we celebrate Brother Leonard's acceptance into the fullness of the Communion of Saints. May God bless us and may Brother Leonard pray for each of us so that one day we will be united before the Lord in heaven.

"The Little Brothers of Mary should be like a violet, hidden and unknown." Blessed Marcellin Champagnat

The violet's humble presence brings an added beauty to the woodland.