

DEDICATION CEREMONIES

Brother Kieran Brennan Memorial Building
Marist College Poughkeepsie, New York
October 26, 1990

We owe much of what we share this afternoon to Brother Richard Rancourt FMS, faculty member of Marist College. He shared his sensitive reflections during the meditation period which concluded the liturgy of the Resurrection honoring the memory of Brother Kieran Brennan. This Mass was celebrated by Father Vincent T. Case the Pastor of Our Lady of Grace Church on September 7, 1989. Father Case was, a student in one of the math classes taught by Brother Kieran at Cardinal Hayes High School in the Bronx, New York.

This dedication of one of the oldest buildings on campus is a significant event in the fascinating history of Marist College. What we do this afternoon in this ;dedication is to affirm the roots of this College. Vital to the traditions of Marist College is the Marist Brother, his pedagogical traditions and his heritage that finds its origin in the rural country-side of southern France proximate to the historical city of Lyons.

Brother Kieran impacted Marist College profoundly with energy, enthusiasm and good humor so typical for this New York City native. He was a masterful college instructor of English, a concerned Director of the Student Brothers, an involved member of the Board of Trustees and an open Chairman of the Board. He accepted the expanded roles of the layman on the Board and also as President of this College. In the years between 1955-1964, he worked along with College President Richard Foy moving a closed, monastic institution to a liberal academic institution.

As we glance north-south, east-west from this spot on campus we are impressed with the expanse and the beauty of the campus. Thousands of students hurry from class to class meeting their instructors on schedule. We are impressed with the vitality and the energy which pervades the academic climate.

It is only right that Brother Kieran share credit for these present conditions. His openness to change permitted growth to occur. He left his position at Marist College in 1964. In 1965 he accepted what would be seven challenging years as the second Provincial Superior of the Marist Brothers Province of Poughkeepsie. The governance of Marist College became the responsibility of a lay Board of Trustees. Brother Kieran stayed with the Board until 1972 when with his resignation he accepted the newer role of lifetime Trustee. Removed, but concerned might best describe his new position. He studied the Trustee minutes, avidly read the student newspaper, "The Circle", and accepted the invitations to be on hand for the special college occasions when these events called for his presence. One of his primary interests as a College Counselor at Mount Saint Michael Academy was Marist College.

Strict and demanding as a classroom instructor, he was warm, kind and gentle. he loved life and he liked people. He influenced many who came in contact with him.

A Marist Brother first, he brought to these relationships the qualities of simplicity, modesty and humility.

President Dennis Murray has invited the College community to study, to reclaim its roots. The founding qualities are identified by simplicity, modesty and humility. There will be found a personal concern for each other and for the members of this campus community in which we study, play and socialize.

This building --- rather modest and quite humble but sturdily constructed --- will with these dedication ceremonies serve as a monument to a religious education, a Marist Brother, who shared his brilliant mind ... sparkling social graces to help make this campus a good place to be. What better way to capture the spirit of Marist College's founding years. As a college community we should never lose sight of our origins.

EULOGY

Our Lady of Grace Parish
Bronx, New York
7 September 1989
by Brother Richard Rancourt

Back in the 60s when Brother Kieran was provincial, his retreat conferences to the Brothers were always brief. This morning when I was composing these few reflections, I felt Kieran's presence and thought I heard him whisper ... "Ziggy! Be brief; be to the point; and be gone."

In a way his whole life was marked by brevity. He walked at a pretty fast pace. He rarely, if ever, dallied in doing things. He was one to get things done and be on his way. And now it seems he took to heart these words of Psalm 89:

But 70 years is our life span, then more, perhaps for the strongest. ... They pass quickly and we fly away.

Kieran turned 71 on his last birthday. Until his cancer finally got a stronghold on his body, Kieran led a full life. A life full of energy, or enthusiasm, of many interests, and of good humor. He was 71 going on 51. We wish God had given him at least those extra ten years. But the mission that God committed to him was completed. Now it's time to let go.

To some of us here, Thomas Patrick Brennan was simply Tom or Uncle Tom. To those who knew him during his grammar school days at St. Catherine of Siena in Manhattan or his high school days at St. Agnes in Manhattan or at St. Ann's Hermitage in Poughkeepsie, he was simply Tommy Brennan. And to many of us he was known simply as Kieran. Whatever we knew him by, his name was mentioned with very deep respect, with much affection, with much love. Perhaps an apt description of Kieran was that he was totally Marist. Whatever work he did, whatever position he held, he brought those special Marist qualities of simplicity, humility, and modesty.

As a young teacher in Savannah GA or at St. Ann's Academy or at the Esopus Juniorate, he could be strict and demanding. Still he was warm, kind, gentle, and wholesomely mischievous. As a teacher in the juniorate he delighted in starting false rumors. A junior might hear him say, "Bro. Master is thinking about giving the juniors the afternoon off to play baseball," Or another might hear, "There might be ice cream for dessert tonight." Let me tell you that

back in the 40s these were extraordinary happenings, the simple joys but great pleasures of Juniorate life. John Colbert, Kieran's present director at the Mount, vividly recalled Kieran spreading the rumor that Brother Master was going to let all the juniors travel by bus to the Mount to see the traditional Thanksgiving Day football game between the Mount and Cardinal Hayes. In time the juniors soon learned to beware of Kieran as the bearer of false rumors.

In 1945 when Kieran, a teacher of English and of Latin in the Juniorate, was assigned to teach mathematics at Cardinal Hayes High School, it just didn't seem right. In those days, however, holy obedience sometimes made excessive demands on God's supportive graces. From the start he admitted his math skills were rusty. So throughout his nine years at Hayes he was never reluctant to ask older or younger Brothers like Linus Carroll how to teach this or that math topic. They knew that on weekends he traveled to Marist College to teach a course in Shakespeare to the student Brothers. And of course, they couldn't forget him as their Juniorate teacher. New here he was humbly and modestly seeking their math advice. Kieran just never ceased to amaze them.

And who could ever forget Kieran as director of the student Brothers (or scholastics as we called them) at Marist College in Poughkeepsie? The years from 1955 to 1964 contained some of Kieran's finest hours. Being responsible for the religious formation of 120 to 150 student Brothers was an awesome responsibility. During those years he worked side with President Linus Foy to transform Marist College from a closed-monastic institution to an open-liberal academic institution.

How well those of us on the faculty remember Kieran shaking his head in bewilderment as student Brothers bombarded him with some of the most recent psychological, philosophical, or theological thoughts of those years. Once again, Kieran readily acknowledged his deficiencies in these areas. But what we faculty members knew was that Kieran was well versed in literature and especially in Shakespeare. For us, Kieran was a living testimony to a statement by the famous psychologist Rollo May that if you want to understand human nature, then read literature. Kieran possessed insight; he had intuition; he knew so much about human nature. He knew his job as director of student Brothers.

He also knew his job as provincial of the Poughkeepsie province. In March 1965 Bro. Paul Ambrose, Assistant General, appointed Kieran provincial. On December 8, 1965 Vatican II held its closing session. Kieran inherited the winds of change. By no means were the days ahead ever smooth sailing. I remember Kieran leaning over to a former provincial and saying, "I'm going to need your help." Little did Kieran realize that he was the man for his times.

The provincial archives in Poughkeepsie contain much information about the accomplishments of past provincials. During their tenure of office, they recorded the number of new schools opened and staffed by many Brothers. At the end of each year, they took note of the increasing number of Brothers in the province. They copied into the annals the increasing number of vocations that flooded our training houses. As provincial Kieran could never bask in the sunlight of such accomplishments. Rather his accomplishments were of a different dimension. he guided the province through those very disturbing and turbulent years of radical change in religious life and of intense social change. Although he rarely showed it, those who know Kieran, just knew that he suffered much during these years. In talking with him one summer day in 1968, he mentioned rather

sadly that things were falling apart. There was little comfort in my philosophical remark, "No, things were just changing."

Luckily, he could read the signs of the times even though he sometimes neither liked nor was he always convinced of what he read. With the advice of his council, he led and decided what he thought was best for the province at that time. The fact that the Brothers of the Province elected him Provincial in 1969 affirmed their trust and confidence in his leadership during those very trying years.

Since 1972 he has been a guidance counselor at Mount St. Michael. Over those 17 years, his steady service at school functions or to the life of the Mount Marist Brothers community gave eloquent witness of that dedication and devotedness that characterized his entire life.

Kieran was outstanding in so many ways as a human being, an administrator, a teacher, a religious. As one individual put it, "They just don't make that kind anymore." No doubt Kieran was precious and unique. Yet even in this, I'm sure that Kieran would prefer to be taken as a piece of life rather than as a work of art.

Just three weeks ago, despite his intense pain and weakened condition, he insisted on attending a three-day provincial assembly of Brothers in Riverdale. His presence was a sign of concern, of genuine encouragement, and one of hope for the future of Marist life. He was totally Marist, a monk's monk, a Brother's Brother.

Five years ago he celebrated his 50th jubilee as a Brother in this church. I know that Kieran was never one to wear his spirituality on his shirtsleeves. On that day he read a simple poem to us. It must have been one of his favorites. Obviously it must have meant so much to him.

One day when I asked him about the poem, I noticed a sparkle and twinkle in his eye and a tiny grin crossed his face. He didn't have to say anything more. Somehow I know what he meant.

On that jubilee day Kieran read these words:

"One night I had a dream. I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord. Across the sky flashed scenes from my life. For each scene, I noticed two sets of footprints in the sand; one belonged to me, and the other to the Lord.

When the last scene of my life flashed before me, I looked back at the footprints in the sand. I noticed that many times along the path of my life there was only one set of footprints. I also noticed it happened at the very lowest and saddest times in my life

This really bothered me and I questioned the Lord about it. "Lord, you said that once I decided to follow you, You would walk with me all the way. But I have noticed that during the most troublesome times in my life, there is only one set of footprints. I don't understand why in times when I needed you most, you would leave me."

The Lord replied, "My precious, precious child. I love you and I would never leave you. During your times of trial and

suffering, when you see only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you."

This poem says much about Kieran, about his life, about his relationship with the Lord. In a sense, it's one of his final messages to us. Now it's time to let Kieran go to let him live in peace with those he loved and who passed on in previous years; to let the Lord carry Kieran into the arms of eternity.