

Brother Joseph Di Benedetto



▲ To conserve space, larger headstones with room for four burials have been introduced, starting with Brothers John Murray and Joseph DiBenedetto.

Received the Breath of Life
c1941

Called to Accept the Marist Brotherhood
c1959, Tyngsboro MA

Was Commended to God
18 March 2005
Benedictine Hospital, Kingston NY

Mass of Christian Burial
22 March 2006
Esopus Retreat House

Interment
22 March 2006
Marist Brothers Cemetery
Esopus, NY

Remembering Bro. Joe DiBenedetto
Eulogy given by Brother Ken Hogan
Marist Brothers Chapel, Esopus New York
March 22, 2006

On this past Saturday morning, just before eleven o'clock, on Saturday, the day marked as special in Roman Catholic spirituality, as Mary's day, Mary our Good Mother, Joseph Anthony DiBenedetto began his new life in the Kingdom of God that had now come. Joseph, Joe, Joey, Butch, Uncle Butch, Joe D, Brother Joe, Brother Joseph, was now welcomed home by a God who loved him unconditionally, a God whom Joe loved in faith supported by hope and expressed in love, a faith that was as strong as it was simple.

Joe's grand and wonder-filled remarkable pilgrimage began at the Clover Hill Hospital in Lawrence Massachusetts on February 7th 1941. It encompassed a rich family life in the Mill City, formation years in New York and New England, ministries in New York City, Pine Ridge South Dakota, three different stops in Lawrence, Massachusetts and ended here at Esopus, New York. It had come to an end, an end that was and is the beginning of Joe's resurrection life.

To begin I offer just a few quick glimpses into Joe's life. There is the little boy who almost drowned because he had wandered from home on his bicycle and toppled into the Spicket River, who, upon racing home soaking wet got his mom's verbal scolding and a warm mother's loving embrace.

There were the years of elementary school, at the end of which Joe thought seriously about attending Essex Agricultural High School. Aren't we blessed that he did not, but instead went to Central Catholic.

There is the svelte Joe; almost a carbon copy of his youthful Dad wending his way through years of religious training, a bachelor's degree in mathematics and eventually a master's degree in education. There is the idealistic Joe professing first and then final vows: living poorly, listening to God's invitations generously and loving not one partner but all of God's people. Joe the vowed

Marist Brother and teacher of mathematics, and, who would argue, Joe the religious educator, absent the degree but certified by grace.

There is Joe the cook in Tyngsboro, the teacher at Hayes and Central and then the great challenge, Joe the missionary answering the call to Red Cloud Reservation in Pine Ridge, South Dakota. Some 12 years later, there is Joe back in the mainstream of Marist life. Sometimes he felt it was more like a maelstrom as he served in school administration as a Dean of Discipline at the Mount.

There is Joe reprieved at last from administration, back in Lawrence teaching math at Central. A two year hiatus from the classroom sees Joe offering his considerable talents in furniture making, carpentry, plumbing and electrical repairs the the humdrum of routine building maintenance. Following one final stint in the classroom at Central and there is Joe arriving at Esopus, a place where his enormous spirit always found refreshment, light and peace. Esopus, for Joe and so many of us, experienced as holy ground; how fitting his last ministry was at this place.

These snapshots offer but a two-dimensional picture of Joseph DiBenedetto. There is behind all of these the flesh and blood Joe that we have known and loved and been taught so much by.

There are countless insights each of us has into the warm, colorful, honest, good man that was Joe. I mention just a few. These are for us the gift, the treasure, the legacy he leaves behind.

There is of course the son, the brother, the uncle, great uncle, nephew and cousin who lived his family and was devoted to them. The Joe of family celebrations, when, along with his dad, with the car or truck loaded with the breads and pastries and cookies from the legendary Italian bakeries of Lawrence, off they would go, bit Joe and our little Joe, off to create memories of rich family quality time in New Hampshire with Shirley and Bill, Linda and John, and Gary, Jennifer, and Church, Ayla, Cameron and often enough Aunt Nancy. This was Joe the carpenter, the craftsman working hours and hours designing and creating Christmas gifts for his family, gifts that become all the more precious since his strong carpenter's hands are not still. This is the Joe on early morning fishing trips with Bill, in attendance at the competitions of grand nieces with Shirley. This is the Joe who faithfully visited the relatives when he was home on vacations, honoring them out of respect, yet, but also out of real affection.

This was the Joe who would come back from the relatives embarrassed by the money they would press upon him, but also aware that his humble acceptance of their largesse allowed them to be proud of him and to feel a connection to the good work he did in his ministry.

This was the Joe who, on how many Saturday evenings with his mentor, his beloved dad, savored escarole soup, Pappy's bread and Pasticcioti. This was Joe, devoted member of the family.

And of course there was Joe the teacher. He loved the classroom, respected and challenged his students, hated correcting papers, saw little value in school uniforms, cared deeply for fellow faculty members and suffered with a school community he was part of faced turmoil.

There is Joe the community member, who cooked anything and everything; whose soups were the very elixir of life. There was Joe who loved a good scotch, preferred non spicy food, devoured tasty bread, and if sleep eluded him at night, would get up and feast on ice cream, cake, bananas or cold pizza. There was the Joe who over the years won the affection of some furry community members two who were named Molly and 'Puddin' and Oreo — well that is another story.

There was Joe the poetic environmentalist who somehow got his point across by rhyming mellow and yellow and down and ... you know what comes next. There was Joe the daring race driver, breaking 55 miles per hour and often doing something less than that. Joe who know every pit stop from New England to New York be it for food or to use the euphemism. How we teased about all of that and how he loved. There is Joe who could yell like the best of them. "Brice what did you do to the chimney pipe; Rene, did you feed us that fish you pulled from the dog's mouth? Hogan, use the small white trash liners not the big leaf bags." Who can forget those big, dark,

penetrating eyes when you knew you blew it, big time. There is the Joe who laughed heartily and whose body needed to be large to hold so great and large a heart. There is the reader Joe who devoured novels of every ilk with yet a predilection for western. There is Joe who always worked above and beyond what he might have asked others to do.

And of course there was Joe who lived being a monk, even when it cost him dearly. Yes, most assuredly there is Joe the faithful religious, the Marist Brother. He loved his brothers, was devoted to saying the rosary, felt badly when he tried reading theology books and wound up nodding off to sleep. There is Joe who really saw himself as a brother, a big brother if you will to young people. In the years spent in teaching and these last years here in Esopus, how many hundreds of young people met Joe, were touched by him and now carry with them a memory of an all too brief encounter with Brother Joe, who offered a kind word or quietly gave a wonderful example of dedication.

Finally there is Joe the person of deep spirituality who believed in prayer and yet was embarrassed by all the prayers promised by so many people during these last 16 months. This is the Joe who I believe wished to spare his family the pain of too much knowledge about his sickness. This is the Joe who must have had more than an inkling of the likely outcome of his illness. Last Saturday afternoon I had a brief conversation with his Aunt Nancy. She said that at Christmas as Joe was getting ready to leave her, he hugged her long and hard, intimating if not saying this would be a last good bye.

In these last weeks, Joe was quiet. I wonder if it was not his time of recollection and preparation for what lay ahead. He didn't want to be a burden. He accepted the idea of hospice residence with calm resignation. It was Joe's way, putting others first, a life well lived and a death well met.

A rich belief of the Lakota Native American people centers on the word "tiyospaye" which translates member extended family. For the Lakota people each person's acts are measured in terms of their impact on the tiyospaye, the extended family. It is not a stretch to say that Joe's acts have impacted a very, very extended family. For each of us that impact will be felt until the day when, please God, we will join Joe and all the saints who have gone before us, who from their labors rest, and for whom life has changed not ended.

At the end of the Constitutions of the Marist Brothers, we read, "the vitality of the Institute can be measured by the quality of our response to God.... For all those to whom we are sent, especially young people, our life will become an invitation to bring the gospel to life as Mary did. Then our founder will see in each of his sons a worker for the kingdom, one chosen by the Father and inspired by the Spirit 'to make Jesus known and loved.' Well done Joe, well done.

As we bid you farewell for now, we are grateful to you Joe for all that you have been and will continue to be, to each of us. We are the better because of you.

You have loved us much. We hope you know how much we love you. Now, as night's angel has softly closed your eyelids we say, with full hearts, Thank you Joe, Be at Peace Joe, the Peace of Christ be with you Joe.

This obituary appeared in the Catholic New York April 13, 2006.

Brother Joseph A. DiBenedetto F.M.S., who taught in the archdiocese of New York, died March 18, 2006 at Benedictine Hospital In Kingston. He was 65 and had been on the staff of the Marist Brothers Retreat House in Esopus.

He taught and was an administrator at Mount St. Michael Academy 1986-1991 and taught at Cardinal Hayes High School, 1966-1970, both in the Bronx. He also served at schools in Massachusetts and on the Red Cloud Indian Reservation in Pine Ridge, S.D.

Born in Lawrence, Mass., he entered the Marist Brothers' high school novitiate in Esopus in 1955, completed his novitiate in Massachusetts and pronounced final vows in 1965. He held a bachelor's degree in mathematics from Marist College and a master's in education from Northeastern University.

He is survived by two sisters, Shirley Preston and Linda DiBenedetto-Mohr, and a brother, Gary.

A Funeral Mass was celebrated March 22 at the retreat house in Esopus, with burial in the brothers' cemetery there.