

Harry's Hesed

Homily at the Mass of the Resurrection for Br. Harold Benjamin Reynolds FSC
22 September 2019, 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Br. Armin A. Luistro FSC

Sisters and Brothers, today, St. Paul in his first letter to Timothy (2:8) urges all of us, “Beloved: It is my wish, then, that in every place the men should pray, lifting up holy hands, without anger or argument.” Br. Harry must have taken this exhortation very seriously for aside from being slow to anger and not keen to argue, Harry prayed constantly. One of his prayers which he disclosed to those closest to him was for the good Lord to allow him to reach the age of 95 after which, he said, the Lord may take him to Himself as He pleases. Harry reached his 95th birthday before his health declined. In God’s ultimate kindness, He gave us six more months bonus so we could wallow in Harry’s loving presence. Lesson number one: be careful what you pray for!



Australia’s distinct food product, Vegemite, was invented just two years before Harry was born and he must have consumed loads and loads of that poison. The brewer’s yeast extract from beer production mixed with salt and extracts from malt and vegetables may contain the secret potion for long life. Throughout his 34,884 days on earth, like a generous serving of Vegemite, Harry would spread the one gospel that he knew best: Kindness! Even as a young student, he was a master of social graces and etiquette in Marrickville and, when he joined the Brothers, he taught the same to his disciples. In the English language, the word ‘harry’ means to persistently carry out attacks but

our good Brother was the exact opposite—he would not want to be a burden to others nor to be unkind or impolite or improper.

חֶסֶד

Hesed is how the Jews of the Old Testament referred to it. It is that **loving kindness** of our God who chose the least powerful among the nations to be his own. Undeserved love poured into our hearts. Not just once and not only in great and exceptional moments but every single day until those small ripples become big waves. Harry’s daily acts of kindness would deconstruct that unfathomable mystery of God’s essential attribute. Kindness is love in bitable chunks. Kindness is heaven in snippets. Kindness is benevolence in tidbits.

It was also in Marrickville where Harry became curious of the Brothers due to the distinctive habit that they wore at mass. His curiosity sparked a vocation that would last 4,020 weeks as a De La Salle Brother. His Australian confrere, Br John Cleary, compared him to the apostle Matthias who ‘possessed the spirit of community’. That iconic smile in the photo we wish to remember him by can come only from a magnanimous heart that simply cannot contain the joy within. The meaning of his vocation as a Christian Brother may be summarized in just one word: Kindness!

חֶסֶד

Hesed in Hebrew is also translated as **everlasting love**. It is the absurd love of Hosea for the harlot Gomer. It is the unconditional love of the compassionate father for his prodigal son. It is love expressed sincerely and willingly even when one does not feel it in one’s emotions or when the object of one’s love does not seem deserving. Harry would disentangle the complexities of religious life and our ultra programmatic strategies for vocations promotions. For Harry, kindness to another

Brother is at the core of our fraternity. Kindness shown to a young person at risk is the best vocation program. Kindness lived daily is the essence of sanctity.

After final profession, he lived his life as a missionary Brother in Malaysia and the Philippines—in Malacca, Penang, and Klang; in Muntinlupa, Manila, Iligan, Lipa, Mandaluyong and Dasmariñas. If there is one virtue that Harry has proclaimed during those 804 months as a missionary it is this—that the disciple is sent to proclaim just one gospel: Kindness! While his old boys remembered him dearly for the edifice that expanded the school's operation in Klang, for organizing the best science fair and their first soiree party with the girls in Malacca, it is his kindness to his students and to everyone who needs some help that people will always remember him by. It is public knowledge that even the crows of Klang would publicly attest to his goodness.



Hesed in Jewish culture is best understood as love that goes **beyond the borders**. It is the shocking scene of Jesus sharing a meal with sinners and prostitutes and tax collectors. It is a call to break barriers and walls and reach out to the periphery. Harry's great joy in living the missionary spirit puts to shame those of us who are attached to our comfort zones. Harry's total trust in the God who bids us into the unknown is a curse on the cautious and the fearful. Harry's undiminished zest for life pierces the veil that hides our indolence and exhaustion.

Who could ever imagine that after his official retirement at age 65, he would volunteer again to a second missionary assignment that would rival his missionary years in Malaysia? Fully engaged with school assignments, finishing a master's degree at 75, multiple English tutorials for foreign students, an earthworm farm in our Manila roof deck and a vegetable patch in the Novitiate, who would ever think Harry ever retired?

His last will contains two pages of bequests to those in need, to street children, to household staff, scholarships for several students in need including his caregiver and funds for the catechetical program. "How do you measure the life of a man?" so the song goes. 34,884 days on earth? 4,020 weeks in religious life? 804 months as a missionary? The song continues: "Remember the love; measure your life in love." This is the closest we can get in understanding Yahweh's *Hesed*. Harry's acts of kindness pop out like memes of God's epic narrative of love.

His legacy of greatness is in the last piece of domino that he has laid down. As his health declined, limbs all bloated, with invasive tubes and needles all over, there was never a whimper from him, not a frown. His good friend, Br. Martin Sellner visited him last Thursday and asked Harry to give him a smile. Harry did—even when everything else in his body was falling apart. That was his swan song, his last domino piece. As Yahweh assured Jeremiah, so Harry's enduring smile assures us all: "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness." May we all surrender like willing pieces of a falling row of dominoes to **Harry's Hesed**.



Today, we lay to rest our dear Brother Harry in the garden of our memories. Upon his request, we omitted flowers during the wake and in his funeral. But every time you see a butterfly in search of blooms of love and kindness, dare to share **Harry's Hesed** to the world around you. May his soul and the souls of all the faithful departed through the loving kindness of God rest in peace! Amen.