

EULOGY

Fr Ken Petersen O.Carm

Ken, Carmelite Friar, Brother, Priest, Mentor, dear friend and faithful companion – Who died peacefully with a gentle exhalation of the breath at that most sacred time when the morning star was rising. He truly died as he had lived, quietly and gently.

As so many of us know, Ken had been struggling with health issues over a few years, but he never gave up – always optimistic to the very end. It was indeed a privilege for me to support Ken for a month of respite at the Mary McKillop Nursing Home in Hawthorn, especially during two weeks of “lock down”.

I first met Ken at Karith in 1981, when I made an eight-day retreat, and again for a second retreat in 1982. It was during this second retreat when I was given the text from the first Book of Kings:

“Elijah went into the cave and did not find God in the mighty wind, or the earthquake, or the fire – but in the gentle breeze.”

During this meditation I knew that one day I would be leading a more contemplative life at Karith, the Carmelite House of Prayer. In 1995, after a wait of 13 years Ken invited me to join with him and others in the new venture of promoting peace through meditation and interreligious dialogue; the Sancta Sophia meditation community was founded in February 1996. And so began what has been an exciting adventure. Ken was most passionate about putting into practice the teaching of Vatican II, of opening ourselves and others to the truth present in all religious traditions, realising that interfaith dialogue underpins all works of peace and justice.

There was no blue-print for life at Karith, it just gradually unfolded as we listened to the Spirit, and as spirit-filled people came into our lives. Yet we were able to maintain our focus, remaining true to our vision and goal. We were aware that the foundation of both the Carmelite and the Dominican Orders in the 13th century came out of the same period of history when the mendicant movement was flourishing, and with it the virtue of mutuality which was the hallmark of our spirituality.

Ken was a devoted Carmelite with a great knowledge and love of this ancient tradition. Often on Fridays which were supposedly days of quiet, Ken would study the rule and constitutions. Last year during the General Chapter he would be tuned into sessions and occasionally would call me to view some capitulare event.

During morning prayer, Ken would consistently remember the Brothers who had died, even as far back as the 19th century. His love for the Order inspired him to be a great mentor to the Lay community, and for many years he worked with Anita Renehan, updating members on the Carmelite teachings related to Vatican II. He was also passionate about the formation of men as Carmelites and over a number of years has been a member of formation teams.

For some years after the founding of Sancta Sophia, Ken would take the monthly trip to Donvale to celebrate Eucharist and assist at the Lay Carmelite meeting - having already celebrated Eucharist at Sancta Sophia and probably helping with lunch as well.

Ken always encouraged me in my pursuit of truth as a Dominican. He was happy to participate in Dominican liturgies and gatherings and to also offer support to the Sisters.

Ken as a priest, never showed a sense of entitlement but always demonstrated that he was a servant disciple of Jesus. In Healesville Hospital, the occupational therapist had written his aim on the board in his room, "I want to be of service to others." He demonstrated his commitment to this service at all times, including social gatherings when he would be the first to take a plate around or get into the kitchen and begin the washing up. As a friend suggested, it was during his illness that Ken showed his greatest service -his contemplative presence which inspired so many.

Ken, a human being whom I judged at first to be very ordinary – not a virtue that many of us aspire to - I soon discovered to be extraordinarily ordinary. Over these past few years, he has shown his vulnerability by openly shedding tears. At this latter stage of his life, Ken always remained positive accepting the journey of this time with grace, showing himself as a humble, gentle soul.

To quote from a card he received while in hospital:

"You have shown us by your life how following Christ can be an enterprise of openness, warmth and constant hospitality."

Ken has been a loving, trustworthy friend and faithful companion both before and during my time of ministry at Sancta Sophia. He has always been someone I could depend on, which was so helpful in living a harmonious life and also when organising events. In our sharing of life at Sancta Sophia, and as members of the Warburton community, we have become better human beings. We have discovered through experience that the greatest wisdom is love, and through this love we have realised freedom.

A short time before he died, Ken told me his life's mission was to help people to be free. As Saint Augustine said, "Love and do what you will".

A frequent description people have used to speak of Ken since his death is,
"He was a beautiful man."

Dear Ken, may you continue your journey of loving - crossing the sea of darkness to the Furthest Shore of Light.

Kathleen Murphy O.P.