

Homily for the Funeral Mass of Fr. Dominic Kearns SMA
St. Josephs, SMA Church, Blackrock Road, Cork
Wednesday 9th April 2008

Preacher: Fr Damian Bresnahan SMA, Provincial Councillor

For the last few weeks of this Easter Season we have been celebrating the life and death and New Life of Jesus Christ.

As we continue that celebration we gather here today to celebrate also the life and death of Fr. Dominic Kearns SMA and to pray with great trust and hope that our friend and missionary is sharing also the New Life of Easter Resurrection with his God.

On hearing of Dominic's passing on Monday afternoon it seemed so appropriate to choose Sunday's gospel passage of the Resurrection experience of the disciples on the Road to Emmaus – somehow travelling on the road with Jesus seemed so right for Fr. Dom who in a true missionary spirit seemed to be always on the move. The disciples were telling the story of all that had happened with Jesus, many of us have been recalling and telling stories about Dominic and his missionary adventures. Fr. Fachtna O' Driscoll, our Provincial Superior, is on visitation in Nigeria at this time and no doubt when the news reaches the villages and parishes where Dominic lived and worked - there will be many stories recalled and told far and wide.

Dominic left his native Ballymote in Sligo and came to Cork to school with the Presentation Brothers before joining the SMA. After ordination to the Missionary Priesthood with the Society of African Missions in 1950

Fr. Dominic was appointed to the North of Nigeria and it was on the roads of Jos and Bauchi that Dominic travelled for the next fifty years of his life. I acknowledge his classmate here today Fr. Tom Furlong who was ordained on the same day and travelled out to the South of Nigeria.

Here on the altar this morning are two of Dominic's companions who were with him for those fifty years: Fr. Joe Maguire from Dublin and Fr. Frank Meehan from Ballindine, Co. Mayo.

During his times of holiday Dominic travelled the roads of America on the Greyhound buses before returning to Ireland. In all his travels in Nigeria or America I use with confidence the words of St. Paul in our second reading that Dominic influenced all he met on the road of life.

One of our SMAs Fr. John Dunne visited the parish in Boston where Dominic worked for three years after retiring from Nigeria and he was really touched by the number of people who came to share how much they appreciated Dominic's presence in the parish. They said '*he was always there for them*'.

Dominic was the only child born to his parents 84 years ago, nevertheless he felt part of a large family because as well as his brothers in the SMA Dominic had friends and contacts all over the world. He had a great gift of faithful letter writing and kept regular contact with so many people. He was free to call to the various missions and convents in N. Nigeria and he had homes in various parts of Ireland and America where he felt free

to go and stay and be accepted almost as one of the family. Homes of those he grew up with as a boy in Ballymote, homes of people he knew from working in Nigeria, homes of parishes he helped out in America – *no one may have known when he was arriving or when he was leaving!* but while he was there he enjoyed great hospitality and love.

When Dominic came to this SMA Community in Blackrock Rd. four years ago, Fr. Fionnbarra O Cuilleain wrote on a paper and handed it to me – it read ‘Dominic was a great missionary – he always worked in the bush areas extending the Church of God and being of service to the people in what ever way he could’. I thought that was a great tribute and compliment.

Dominic always held rural appointments in very remote areas – it seemed to suit him to live alone and carry out his missionary work in his own style – but even though he lived alone Dominic always enjoyed the company of others – and others enjoyed Dominic because he was blessed with a great sense of humour and a wonderful wit. Dominic had a mighty laugh and an endearing chuckle and others felt it was good to be with him. As well as enjoying the hospitality of others, Dominic was very hospitable and welcoming. Someone told me on the phone the other day of travelling with Dominic to outstations and enjoying the contents of his basket that he had prepared for the journey – a treasured memory for many.

Dominic communicated with more than words – he had a special wink and an almost rascally smile and his big eyes of acceptance made him loved by so many. For 50 years Dominic brought joy to the villages and homes of so many peoples – he loved the Hausa language and people. A few days ago Fionnbarra O’ Cullineain was keeping company with Dominic on his sick bed. Dominic had stopped speaking and Fionnbarra no longer speaks words himself due to his sickness – Fionnbarra used the only word he can easily pronounce – Allah, the Hausa for God – he repeated it $\frac{3}{4}$ times: Allah. Allah, Allah in a spirit of prayer knowing that Dominic would soon meet God face to face – Dominic looked at him Fionnbarra and gave a big wink which was his Amen – yes I know what you’re about – yes I know I’ll soon meet my God ... and it’s o.k.

Dominic’s playful or prayerful wink endeared him to peoples everywhere: the Hausa people, his SMA fellow missionaries, the OLA Sisters – and I must make particular mention of Sr. Dolores Davis in Akwanga and Sr. Mary Cahill in Zawan where Dominic lived in the hospital compound for the last 3 years of his time in Nigeria, the Sisters of St. Louis, the Ursulines of Gambar, the PW workers who often sorted out his old pick-up van, his friends from childhood and adult life, and very much the Community and Staff of SMA House where Dominic has lived his last four years.

Even though Dominic has travelled the world, his own native Ballymote and Sligo has always been dear to him and so often he spoke of Sligo. Of course Florrie Mc Guinness for years has always sent him the key pages of the Sligo Champion to keep him abreast of happenings at home.

A few months ago in the SMA Community Oratory at the end of Mass when the community was praying for the canonization of our SMA Founder Dominic was keeping Sligo to the fore. The prayer goes, ‘Lord God you called Melchior Marian de Bresillac to serve you. To make you known and loved you sent him to India and then to Africa...’ Dominic said ‘you sent him to India and then to Sligo’. A harmless slip of the tongue which spoke of Dominic’s home...Sligo and Africa.

Words that come to mind when one thinks of Dominic are: joyful, humorous, witty, funny, dedicated, a great missionary, prayerful, gentle, hospitable, good, respectful, special, endearing, loveable, loving, 'fun to be with', a good friend, unique, private, very special. And I'm sure that if we took time to go around the Church everyone here would add their own word.

In the first scripture reading in our celebration today from the prophet Isaiah – we heard that lovely invitation in chapter 55 – which calls us so freely and generously – Dominic answered that invitation over 65 years ago – on Monday 7th April at 4.00pm Fr. Dominic gently took his last breath and responded to God's invitation for the last time. We pray this funeral Mass in confidence that Fr. Dominic Kearns will enjoy forever the fullness of God's presence and be reunited with his mother and father and the multitudes of people whose lives he influenced on his missionary journeys on the road of life as a disciple of the Risen Christ. Not in the village of Emmaus but in the villages of Sligo and Jos and Bauchi and Dublin and Boston and Galway and Cork.

May the Lord reward him for his long and generous missionary life – and may the gentle and “chuckly” Dominic Kearns rest in perfect peace.