

Passing of my 'Spiritual Father'

I recently lost my "spiritual father" but found consolation by attending his wake and funeral.

Jesuit Father William German passed away after a short illness in his 92nd year and his 60th year of priestly service. For twenty-five years, he was my spiritual director and confessor, a gentle guide who helped this priest and bishop address his hopes and dreams, fears and concerns with a tender wisdom. I was always glad when we could meet so that he could recall for me the first principles of living as a disciple of Jesus.

Father Bill would receive me with great joy and an irresistible smile. It was easy in his presence to feel blessed and loved by God, for he effortlessly reflected his own experience of God.

As a spiritual mentor, he mastered the art of active listening. With a few questions, he would amiably guide me to open my mind, my heart, and my life that the pressures of academic life and church management could inhibit. He could sense the subtle movements of the Spirit that I sometimes overlooked or was afraid of so that he might guide me to self-understanding and acceptance. He regularly pointed out that these personal experiences of mine stemmed from God's prior understanding and acceptance of me.

From his rich repertoire of stories and experiences overseas, Father Bill freely illuminated the topics we were discussing.

Father Bill was born in Toronto in 1925. He entered the Jesuit noviceship in 1943. After initial studies in philosophy, he went to Addis-Ababa, Ethiopia to teach for three years. His desire to labour abroad on mission led him to Darjeeling, India where he was ordained a priest in 1956. He served in India for more than thirty years as a headmaster, teacher and prefect, retreat director, associate pastor, and pastor. Working initially with Canadians, he laboured with an increasing number of Jesuits of Indian origin. Generosity and enthusiasm marked his entire ministry.

Father Bill returned to Canada in 1985 and, after a year of specialization in spiritual direction, was posted to Toronto's Our Lady of Lourdes Parish where he was the associate pastor for twenty-nine years. His parishioners held him in affection and appreciation. He supported many priests who came to him for counsel. His room was full of cards and other gifts from the many people who loved him.

Father Bill was a man of compassion, a strength that allowed him to enter into the pain, guilt, and fear of people like me searching for God and His forgiveness.

Our meetings inevitably concluded with my confession. At the close of these, we would negotiate a penance suited to what I was dealing with and to show contrition and a

purpose of amendment. When we would hit on the right penance, he would shout "hurray!" as he also did when, together, we could see the path ahead.

Although his long life as a Jesuit and a priest was not without trials, difficulties, and disappointments, Father Bill never doubted God's powerful, saving love for him. It was that experience of love that made him such a loving man and an eloquent prophet of God's love. A warm contributor to the Jesuit community, he had a graced sense of humour. His friendliness and open personality delighted those with whom he lived. He enjoyed bridge, cribbage, and other card games. Win or lose, he would howl with contentment.

Father Bill was a trusted confessor, a wise spiritual director, a captivating friend, and a holy priest, who enjoyed food, drink, and healthy laughter. I shall miss him. May he rest in peace.