

Spring 2018

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Recommended Citation

McAuley, P. (2018). Gerry Scott CSSp – A Passion for Life and for People. *Spiritan Magazine*, 42 (1). Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/spiritan-tc/vol42/iss1/11>

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Gerry Scott CSSp

A Passion for Life and for People

Paul McAuley CSSp

“A Bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other” – one of the first pieces of wisdom I remember hearing from Fr Gerry in my novice year of 1981. Today, he might have upgraded it to “A Bible in one hand and an iPhone in the other.”

What Gerry was saying, of course, was that to be an effective religious or priest, one had to be fully engaged in the world, attuned to what was going on in people's lives and families, along with the movements in church, community, country and the events, politics and issues of the world.

While the saying has always remained with me, it was not necessarily new or original. In 1848 the second founder of the Spiritans, Fr Francis Libermann, encouraged the clergy to vote, to take part in society and in doing so, bring gospel values to transform society for the better. Our Saviour Jesus Christ got into trouble for basically saying the same thing, even though there were no newspapers or iPhones in first century Palestine.

Fr Gerry was a people person. While not underestimating the importance and power of prayer, meditation and reflection – he knew that they were the tools for his ministry – the ministry itself was to people and for people.

St. Paul writes to the Romans: “The life and death of each of us has its influence on others.” We do not live



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in a vacuum, we are not shut away. Each moment of each day can bring us face to face with another person and the possibility of passing on the goodness of God's grace to that person whether they be friend or stranger.

The Gospel of John recalls the comforting words of Jesus, “Do not let your hearts be troubled ... there are many rooms in my Father's house.” Gerry should have no trouble fitting in then, for while he was with us, he was a person of many rooms.

If you look at his CV, he was all over the place: Ireland, Trinidad, then the appointment to Canada – teaching in Toronto, hospital ministry in Hamilton, parish ministry in Guelph, studies in St. Louis, Missouri – then Formation and Novitiate in Connecticut and Farnham, Quebec. Off again at a later age in life to the very difficult ministry in Papua New Guinea in the South Pacific. Then Australia, back to Toronto at St. Joseph's, Highland Creek, followed by St. Rita's parish in Woodstock, Holy Spirit parish in Edmonton, and when called to help again in formation, Gerry left his comfort zone and ministered in Houston, Texas.

In the late nineties, he came back to Guelph a second time, and then for the past number of years, to the Cathedral and St. Stephen's Chapel in downtown Toronto, and in Whitby. Yes, there were

many rooms in Gerry's life – he won't have a problem with the many rooms in our Father's house.

Growing up in the village of Elphin, County Roscommon, Ireland (population about 1,600) I wonder did young

Michael Gerard Scott realize he would travel the world and impact so many others?

A people person

God used Gerry's personality to further his mission – he was a people person – just as comfortable talking with a woman at the market in Papua New Guinea as spending time with a seminarian in Houston, Texas.

A people person is someone who is comfortable in their own skin and has a positive outlook on life, even in times of difficulty. The prophet Isaiah reminded Israel in their troubled times: "Shout for joy, you heavens; exult you earth! You mountains, break into happy cries." Yes, being human is difficult; it is not all lightness and smiles. We all have times of great joy, fun and celebration, but we are also hit with moments of sadness, pain and sometimes even despair. I was moved by the words in Fr Gerry's obituary about his relationship with the Irish community here in Toronto: "He was always ready to assist any members of that community in both times of joy and celebration, grief and farewell."

Thus far, perhaps you may think this homily is tending to be a canonization of Fr Gerry. No it is not. I lived with Gerry in four different Spiritan communities in Quebec, Papua New Guinea and Toronto. When you live at close quarters, you get to know people's faults. I knew some of Gerry's and he certainly knew mine. Knowing your own faults and accepting them is God's way of making us compassionate human beings.

Gerry knew his faults, failings and limitations and because he did, he was the compassionate, caring, empathetic person whose life we celebrate today. St. Paul speaks of his faults – his "thorn in the flesh". He did not like it, but it kept him grounded and kept him from boasting in himself rather than boasting in Christ. Gerry knew his fears, failures



Fr Gerry Scott received the Irish Person of the Year award in 2004.

and limitations – they made him the compassionate person we knew.

I probably would have been kicked out of the Spiritans were it not for Fr Gerry. He saw me fail, he knew my weaknesses – maybe that I was not cut out to be a Spiritan priest. But then he looked on his own life and prayed upon it and decided to give me another chance. If it were not for Gerry, I would not be standing up here today in St. Joseph's as a priest at his funeral.

Pope Francis has said: "The thing the church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity."

Gerry knew himself, knew people and had an understanding of our imperfections – the messy but beautiful business of being human. He brought all of that into his church ministry.

Gerry loved sports

I know that the members of the Gaelic Athletic Association (the GAA) who provide the honour guard for Fr Gerry, might be wondering if there is going to be reference to sports in this homily.

Yes, being a people person and fully engaged in life, Gerry loved sports. It was as natural to him as breathing. He grew up playing sports, he came to Canada and got into hockey here, but he always loved Gaelic football, rugby and hurling.

Many years ago, there was an important Gaelic football match being played in Ireland – only televised live in specific pay-per-view locations. Some of the Irish Spiritans from our Laval House on Victoria Park Avenue wanted to see it. Gerry asked me if I would like to join them. So we set out early on a Sunday morning to go to an Irish pub ... I think it was Allens's on Danforth.

I remember our late Fr Jimmy Dunne being with us. I thoroughly enjoyed the event, though I did not know what was going on. Every few minutes, after there was a loud cheer or an anguished

groan, I would have to nudge Fr Jimmy or Fr Gerry and whisper, "Did something important just happen?"

Gerry, in spite of our time together in different places and ministries, I still don't understand Gaelic football, rugby or hurling, but since I am a fisherman, I do have a sports prayer for you:

Loving God, when my final cast is made
I then most humbly pray,
When nestled in your landing net
As I lay peacefully asleep,
You'll smile at me and judge
That I'm good enough to keep!

Yes, Gerry, we are here today to remember you, your faith, your passion for life and for people. God will surely say, "You're good enough to keep." So, until we meet again in our Father's house, goodbye – our teacher, our brother, our friend. ■