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Tributes to Fr Gerry Pantrin

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Tributes to Fr Gerry Pantin



“He heard the cries of people he saw as his neighbours and took a walk and listened to the concerns of the community. We thank the Pantin family for giving the country a brilliant mind that was not clouded by delusions of grandeur, but one that must do something practical for his neighbour.” — Fr Gregory Augustine, Provincial Superior of the Spiritans in Trinidad

‘Send us more like him’

Lara Pickford-Gordon

Catholic News

“One man’s work has ended. Another person’s work has to begin,” said Spiritan Archbishop Joseph Harris as he delivered the homily at the funeral Mass for Spiritan Fr Gerry Pantin, who died at the age of 85. “We ask God to raise up in our land more people like Fr Gerry, so the many people who live without hope may be able to find hope.”

Among those paying their respects were President Anthony TA Carmona, Minister of Foreign Affairs Winston Dookeran, former First Lady Zelayhar Hassanali and Independent Senator Helen Drayton along with the Executive Director of SERVOL, Martin Pacheco.

Archbishop Harris said while the world judged the worth of a person by their qualifications, achievements or popularity, a person of the Church was judged by “characteristics of the Church”, and the first such characteristic was “religious imagination”. He explained that this was not a flight from reality, but the ability to look beyond the status quo and see what could and should be achieved. “In 1970, Fr Gerry looked at the status quo and saw it was not really doing anything. He saw what could be and should be.

“He left his prestigious job teaching Sixth Form students at St Mary’s College and went up to Laventille to offer hope to the people who had no hope. Out of listening to them, Servol was born.

“In Laventille people knew him as someone who was always available with a listening ear, always ready to help. He walked with ‘kings and princes’, but also with the down-trodden and those on the margins.

“In many ways Fr Gerry was fearless and we looked at him and admired his fearlessness, his ability to witness to truth and speak truth to power even when harm could follow.”

The Archbishop told the large congregation that Fr Pantin was a man of faith and it was this faith founded on Christ that enabled him to do many good and beautiful things. ■

‘A giant on earth’

Roland Quesnel CSSp

Trinidad Express Newspaper

Gerry was a year younger than me, brighter than me and more creative in every way — giving promise of things to come. The oldest of a family of nine, he was the older brother of Tony, the Archbishop of Port of Spain.

From the time I knew him, Gerry was a creative intellectual. He studied science at University College, Dublin, edited a short-lived magazine, *Tomorrow’s Labourers*, and started a film club at the Spiritan Seminary in Kimmage Manor, Dublin.

After ordination, he returned to CIC in 1958 to teach botany and zoology. But after the labour unrest in the late 60s and the Black Power riots in 1970, he realized academic learning wasn’t enough and what was needed was to rescue teenagers from their ignorance, and give boys and girls a trade that would enable them to earn a living for the rest of their life.

He called his work SERVOL (Service Volunteered For All). Blessed by religious and civic authorities, it is known in many countries. Gerry received the Alternate Nobel Peace Prize, the Trinity Cross and other decorations including a doctorate from Duquesne University, Pittsburgh.

From the beginning of SERVOL he was helped by Sister Ruth Montrichard SJC. She accompanied him to Stockholm, Israel and elsewhere, promoting the good news of self-help.

The whole island of Trinidad is in mourning along with many of his friends overseas.

It is easier for us in Spiritan House to accept his passing — for the past three years he was confined to his room with Alzheimer’s. There Sister Ruth and the nurses looked after him.

The Book of Genesis said, “There were giants on earth in those days, these were the heroes of old, men of renown.” We won’t see the likes of Gerry again.

May his great and generous soul rest in peace. He is smiling on us now from his place above. ■