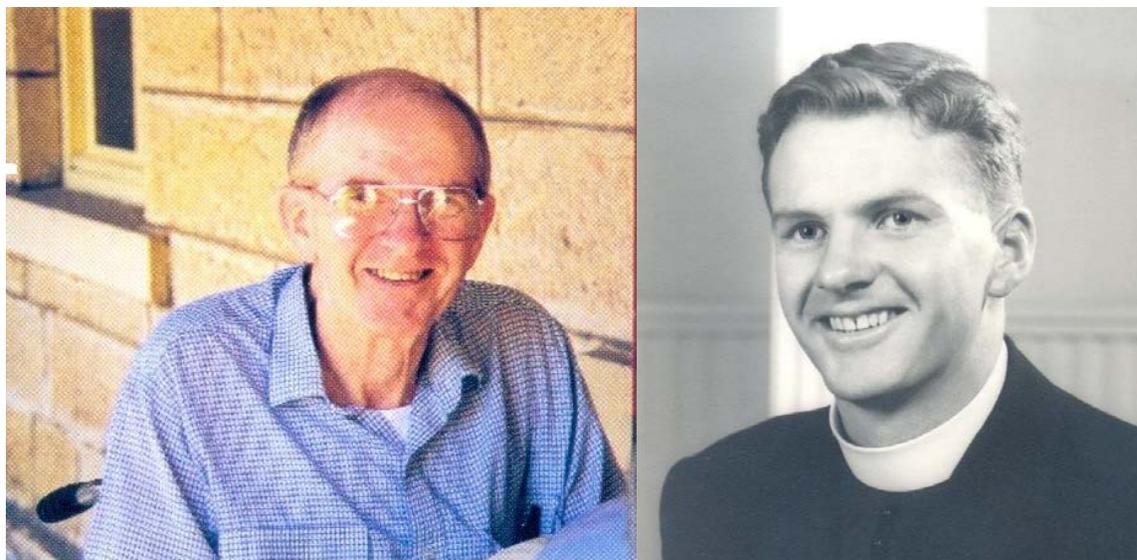


Remembering Pat Reynolds SM



Fr. Patrick Reynolds SM (1931-2001)

Gerard Hall SM

Like many others, I find myself reflecting on the life of Pat Reynolds. I first met Pat, so my mother tells me, at the Catholic Church in Wiangaree when Pat was a newly-ordained priest. He came "to supply" or to "give a mission" as the Church language used to express it. A strikingly handsome, athletic, young priest who was full of missionary zeal. My mother recalls how he placed his hand on my brother, Peter, and said something about God's ways not being ours. He took time, shared the sadness and, through these very human actions and words, communicated that God's love does not depend on physical appearance, mental health or life always delivering things according to our pre-conceived plans. It was not that Pat put all this into words: he

didn't need to; his presence to people was enough. He shared their littleness, their fears, their hopes by being-with-them in their human lot. He inspired confidence by being a person of faith.

Little was Pat to know that his own missionary plans would soon be cut short by such a debilitating illness as MS. That was the next time I met Pat. He came to Woodlawn when I was a young, junior student. We knew he had been ill but thought little of that at a time when we were all too busy negotiating our own identities in face of that big adult world ahead of adolescence. He fell through a glass door and, perhaps, we boys thought that was funny. It made me think of God and why things should be so. Even in those times, which in retrospect must have been very difficult years for Pat, he struck me as a person of great faith and real substance. I think that's when I decided to become a Marist Father and go to the missions. His simplicity and zeal were his twin gifts and I knew I wanted to be like that.

In my seminary years, Pat continued to be an inspiration as to the kind of person and Marist I should be. Looking back, they too must have been painful times for Pat as we so enthusiastically embraced "the reforms," as we called them, of Vatican II. A lot of young men came and went. "Rusty" was always there. In his office. Giving out the smokes (but not too many) when that happy day arrived! Organising Field Day, football matches with local seminaries, and trips to Camden to pick up Arthur Moore's apples. Always making sure the supplies were available. How distant this must have been to his dreams of saving the whole world for Christ in Japan. But, remarkably, he just never complained. He accepted his lot with remarkable equanimity knowing in his own heart that God's ways are indeed not our own.

In those days I would occasionally be the one to take Pat to the functions of the Marist Seminary Committee, the MS group, to schools where he would do some counselling or hear confessions. It seemed, to me at least, he never wavered in his simple acceptance of God's will for him: a witness to his faith in a confusing but loving God. If he couldn't preach to "the natives overseas", as Pat would put it, he would preach to "the natives at home". But it was never a condescending preaching. Pat was too insightful to think that big words or complex philosophies or



theologies would convince anyone of anything important. The Gospel was a matter of believing, trusting, hoping no matter what. A matter of fidelity. His own life witnessed to the simple but profound reality of God's redeeming presence at the heart of the world – especially in suffering humanity.

Fidelity in the face of everything that life could throw up. The sacredness of the ordinary. Suffering as a source of goodness. He had no time or room for "bullshit" (Pat was always earthy). Secretly he knew there was a lot of it in the world (& probably especially in us, the seminarians, that God had now selected for him to minister to in his priestly life). Pat loved stories and, for many years, cards (his favourite was Cribb – and he had an eye for young Tony McCosker's special bluffs!). Pat may have kept some of us on the straight and narrow; more to the point, he knew when we had gone off the rails and would let us know with a stern but fatherly word. Never a grudge. Never a sense that

you were unresolved or unredeemed because you had done something especially stupid. Just a look that would say: "Time, don't you think, to grow up!"

In the years since, meeting Pat at Waitara or Hunters Hill, or when he would visit at Haberfield or Lane Cove in his jalopy, he had such genuine interest in meeting you. He would ask questions about your life, work and ministry about which few others would have the time or interest to enquire. He would be genuinely pleased for your successes, sorrowful with you in your failures, concerned with you in your challenges. I suppose he had gained the gift of contemplation – although I suspect this was never his natural bent. Here was a man, a priest, a Marist, a suffering servant, who had opened his heart to suffering and learnt to embrace it as his path to sanctity. Not a lesson most of us want to learn. Probably not a lesson Pat himself wanted to learn. And that, in my book, makes him a saint. Not because he was without imperfection. But because he never let sorrow and disappointment defeat him – and found in the darkest depths of suffering an at least small light of resurrection. And that, for him, was enough.

Now he knows. The wheelchair gone. The pain dissolved. The meaning understood. A life with tragedy in which the beauty of things begins to appear. God's ways so strange. Pat's response so strikingly simple: be faithful; try to be good; accept what can't be changed; give yourself wholly to the present moment no matter how trivial, how ordinary, how lowly. Goodness is there. Christ is there. Christ has risen.

Fr Patrick Reynolds SM inspired many by his hidden, humble witness which, for much of his life, was done from a wheelchair. This reflection by a Marist confrere was written on the day after Pat's death which was 27th March 2001.

Gerard Hall SM