

EULOGY FOR BROTHER MARK RYAN

Kevin Francis Ryan was born to George Vincent Ryan and Nellie Kelly of Werris Creek, New South Wales, on Thursday the 15th February 1934. He had two older brothers Barry and John.

Kevin's father was a Station Master, a very itinerant profession, and so the Ryan family found themselves wandering deliberately from one New South Wales "one-pony" country town to another, the Ryan boys going from one school to another. Six in all for Barry and John, four for Kevin until he arrived at Holy Cross in 1944. In Barry's words "they were always the new kids."

Kevin also had to cope with the death of his mother Nellie, an artist and musician in January 1944. Kevin was only nine. Nellie is buried at Tocumwal, and one of Brother Mark's pleasures every year, if not twice a year, was to visit her grave. The last time was January this year with a number of family members. Family has always been a very important element in his life.

With Kevin's father having to travel from place to place and with the two older boys living their own lives it was decided that Kevin should attend a boarding school. Holy Cross College, Ryde, was selected. At nine years of age, in 1944, Kevin arrived at Holy Cross. In his own words it took him a while to adjust. His brothers, Barry and John were his frequent visitors. But adjust he did, graduating in 1950. So began Kevin/Mark's long association with Holy Cross College.

Kevin sometimes mentioned one his very best teachers was Brother John Gallagher. Br John taught him Science. So, no surprise that when Kevin left school his career choice took a scientific bent. He took a diploma in applied chemistry, which in 1964, he was able to transform into a degree.

For eight years he worked in a small laboratory as a control chemist in the cosmetics and pharmaceutical industry. Despite eight good years living the life of a young man about town, he felt that for him there was more to life. He had kept contact with the Patricians and he was hearing of their adventures out west to Granville, Blacktown, Fairfield, and Liverpool, and he decided that he would like "to give it a go." He decided to join the Patrician ranks much to the great surprise of his father and brothers.

Kevin Ryan, nudging 25 years of age, came to Wahroonga at the start of 1959 – a mature age postulant entering an environment of mainly younger men/boys! Those younger ones were impressed with this new man who already had a profession in the medical/pharmaceutical field. Experience in the armed forces, what's more! Wow! His arrival signalled an obviously really significant life decision. Those who were there with him were impressed!

From that time, through postulancy, into Novitiate, and through to temporary, and later 'final' profession as a Patrician Brother, Kevin, now Mark, was fully committed. Mark made his First Profession on Sunday the 22nd May 1960 and straight to Patrician Brothers' College Fairfield, he went, and at the age of twenty-six found himself in a classroom for the first time. He never looked back. Forty-four years later he was still teaching despite being legally retired. Well into his eighties he was

leading senior science students at Holy Cross to awards in science. Titration they call it. (Philip Stewart mentioned this?).

Mark remained in Fairfield until 1963 when he was asked to go to Wahroonga in charge of the young men aspiring to be Patrician Brothers. Some of those men are here today! He stayed in Wahroonga until 1967 and then headed back to Ryde staying until the end of 1971 during which time he taught, was acting Principal in 1968 and Principal from 1969 until 1970.

In 1972 Mark headed back to Fairfield where he taught, was Science coordinator and Principal from 1987-1990.

In 1991 Mark returned once again to Holy Cross College where he once again taught and was Superior of the Brothers community from 1994 until 2004.

For the Brothers, Mark was Community Leader (Superior) par excellence. This was just another aspect of his leadership qualities, his humanity, and his example as a religious. We believe he was the longest serving community leader in the Congregation with thirty-six years at the helm. He was disappointed that he never made it to the Brothers' General Chapter nor that he was never on the Province Leadership Team but in reality it didn't worry him too much. Stories abound about Mark's goodness and I was very happy that my first teaching appointment was to Fairfield where Mark was Superior and where he really looked after the young Brothers. Let me take you back to the late 1960's and share one Brother's memory with you:

This was here at Holy Cross; the boarding school was still in operation alongside a growing Regional High School. Mark, along with his fellow Patricians, younger and older, rose early, worked hard all day as all those in our schools did, and, managed to rouse, feed, supervise and tuck-in a diverse range of boarders, primary and secondary. The end of each day, weekdays and weekends, was followed quickly by collapse into bed to be ready for the next episode. One Brother, who shared in all this with Mark and the others, was also doing night time studies at University. By about 9.15 p.m. each night, he would jump on a couple of buses and, dragging a bit by this time, cross Victoria Road round 10.30 p.m. Who waited up for him to have a cuppa and a chat? – Mark Ryan – kindnesses never forgotten and still valued. Many such stories abound about Mark!

Another essential element of Mark's life was his love of music. Mark was his mother's son and he, like her, developed a strong interest and love for music. Apart from a few lessons at the piano, strangely a bagpipe was eventually his first instrument of choice. As Barry relates, so busy was Kevin during the day that he had to practice his bagpipe in an inner-city suburb at night. He gained something of a reputation, his antic even making it to the newspaper.

Mark's mother had a sweet soprano voice, so much so her pet name was Toti after Toti Dal Monti of the 1920s to 40s. Mark had a strong voice and was the leading voice of the Patrician choir for many years. But musically he came into his own when he entered the world of the brass bands. During Mark's time in both Fairfield and Ryde he was immersed totally in school bands. He played in the Holroyd Brass Band and of course the Leichhardt Celebrity Brass Band who will be part of Mark's

farewell at the Field of Mars. He would faithfully totter off each Wednesday night to practice. He made so many good friends through music and some of those he taught music to still came to visit him and take him out for a meal, he really loved those times and always came back with a big smile on his face. I suspect a number of his former band members/students are here with us today. Mark was involved with so many musical productions throughout his life such as the centenary celebrations of the Patrician Brothers in 1983. He was part of the committee to organise a gathering of religious men and women to meet Pope John Paul in 1985 and so many other activities.

When we look at the life of Mark Kevin Ryan we see a picture of a very balanced man. He taught very well and put his best efforts into his teaching. He had outside interests in the field of music and many good friends. Along with this he was an excellent cook, a man who loved entertaining. His prayer life as a Patrician was most important to him, as was his community life. He also dabbled in drawing and painting. Add to this his family relationships and that word balanced comes up again. Mark was simply a lovely guy and all round good person.

Perhaps I can leave the final words to Hugh Mackay, Australian author:

In the introduction to his book *"The Good Life"*, he says this..."I'm referring to a life that is characterised by goodness, a morally praiseworthy life, a life valuable in its impact on others, a life devoted to the common good. This type of life is marked by a courteous respect for others' rights, a responsiveness to others' needs and a concern for others' wellbeing. A person living this life will be motivated by kindness and compassion....if you set out to be good or to do good because of what's in it for you, then you'll have missed the whole point of the journey."

The words of Jesus are one's we can clearly hear today.... "Well done good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your God!"

