

Dominic Ruegg's Eulogy
By Br. Camillus Chávez, fsc
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How do you put a man's life into a few words? It's impossible, because each person is a mystery, a special image of the Divine. But as humans, we try the impossible. That's what I do today.

Dominic was like a diamond, with many facets each facet reflecting his inner world. And like a diamond, these facets contribute their own special brilliance to the splendor of the whole precious stone.

The Joseph Alemany Community grappled with the mystery of Dominic this past Sunday and came up with some broad brushstrokes trying to paint a verbal picture of Dominic. Here are some one word or short phrase descriptions.

Imperturbable, this is the latter-day Dominic. I knew him at times in his younger days, when he could be deeply disturbed by problematic situations, but in his later years, he was set in a deep bedrock of peace. The sage would take over in serious difficult moments and come to some kind of inner resolution, similar to what St. Teresa wrote, "Let nothing disturb thee, nothing affright thee, all passes away." That was part of the mystery of why people were attracted to him: he had the gift of great presence so that he gave peace and shared it with those in his ambiance without trying.

Another word that might describe him is joyous; e. e. cummings describes his father this way which I here apply to Dominic.

"Joy was his song, and joy so pure,
a heart of star by him could steer."

He enjoyed everything, good food, good scotch, good company, great literature, and music and nature. All of his brought him a great, quiet happiness. I once accused him of being a nature mystic. Why did he enjoy his cruises so much, meeting new people, seeing nature in all of its manifestation throughout the globe, the exotic animals of Africa, and needing to see all of the world, visiting all six continents of the world. Did he sense God working in all His creation? I think he did. We called him tightwad because he saved all his pennies, but he was on a mission to enjoy the whole world by seeing God working in every place in the world, and praise God by drinking it in with all his being.

He was a peacemaker, a synthesizer. He had that power in our community when we were having an intense discussion and gotten polarized on an issue, he would wait, reflectively and at the end come up with some solution that established us in harmony

Scholar: Dominic was an accomplished scholar, earning a Ph.D. in Latin with a minor in Greek. Later on, he earned a Master's in theology from Notre Dame; He was the perpetual student, always reading, not afraid of the latest developments in theology, eagerly perusing Elizabeth Johnson's latest books and whatever new developments there were about Teilhard de Chardin. He was not afraid of the new, but also thoroughly digested it so as to ground himself in solid reasoning,

Not satisfied with reading, he had to explore something personally, that's why he got involved in doing underwater archeology in the Garigliano River near Rome where there lay the hulk of an old ship. He spent five summers there. The findings of this expedition were written up in a wonderful pictorial book. It put the town of Garigliano on the map. The citizens of the town were so grateful that they later made Dominic an honorary citizen with great fanfare and a town holiday. He was decorated with a big beautiful, colorful sash, a medal and a special proclamation with fancy writing.

Curious: again this was not a superficial part of him, but rather a deep curiosity seeking to understand the world more profoundly, His enthusiasm was catching, it was a deep energy in him

A friend of mine, a teacher in the seminar, in talking to him remarked that he had a child-like wonder and curiosity that inspired him to ever know more and understand the mystery of things. She said, "He makes me want to know more, gives me a thirst for reading and pursuing the big questions of the seminar courses."

Spiritual: His gift was not just intellectual; he shared a deep spiritual energy about what filled him with wonder so that it touched others deeply in their spirits. His enthusiasm for the courses he taught the scholastics had them picking up phrases they repeated over and over with gusto, they (the Israelites) wanted to become like the nations. The phrase was repeated on many occasions, they went around shouting, at appropriate occasions, how people were "Like the nations."

Imperious: In our community discussion, the phrase came up, "he always used the imperative, "John, get me a glass of scotch." This was true, but when confronted with it, he didn't argue, he simply smiled and silently acknowledged the reality of the fact. This was like the mark

some Japanese artists make on a painting so that it is not perfect, preventing them from daring to say they have attained perfection. This was actually a mark of his basic great humility. He really had mastered ego. Dominic knew he had weaknesses and accepted them graciously as indicating that he was not perfect and was not upset by that fact. At the same time, he did not idolatry perfection.

A tease: this was part of Dominic. There is a classic example of this in the following story. Br. William Beatie, a member of our community, had a quick wit and a sharp tongue which usually bested Dominic in any repartee. He also was not afraid to tackle anybody who was not living up to the ideals of the Joseph Alemany Community. In fact, he would often go after Dominic on a variety of small petty issues. This particular day, at our community meeting, Dominic very matter of factly told us he had visited a friend of his, and that she had a Japanese toilet, which though expensive, it cost \$1,000.00 dollars was absolutely wonderful because it would do everything, after a person "did their duty," the toilet wiped, washed, cleaning, powdered, perfumed, the person, Dominic said, and he went on and on about its many virtues, I think it even played music.

The denouement came when he said, "I think it would be a grand idea if I got one, it would make life so much simpler for me and I know we can afford it." At this William burst out with indignation, and came to the defense of the idea of the simple life as an ideal of the community, And how could Dominic as a founder of the Joseph Alemany Community not know better, and began to berate him about how he was flaunting the ideals of our community, ignoring the need of being careful of its finances, of having a simple way of life, and that this extravagance was totally contrary to our vow of poverty. In the meantime Dominic lowered his head, in seeming humility, accepting all these rebukes quietly, but I could detect an incipient smirk on his face. We all knew what was going on. We knew Dominic was kidding, but he had caught William hook, line, and sinker, and we all knew it. He didn't care about the toilet he just wanted to get Bill excited and did he succeed, Inside we were guffawing, but kept our cool enjoying the scene to the max. Finally, after Dominic smiled, William realized he had been snookered in a masterful way and stopped his ranting. We all laughed. It remained a source of absolute glee for the rest of us for days. It still remains a great moment of humor in the annals of the Joseph Alemany Community.

A great sub-director: My relationship with him goes back to my scholasticate days in summer 1949 when we got him, as a new sub-director, straight from Catholic University. Br. Dominic Ruegg, fresh from CU as he referred to the university, had developed an outrageous academic accent. We wondered, "Was he not from San Francisco, where had he learned this manner of speech?" "Beauty is truth and truth beauty." We soon questioned him on this and within six months he spoke normally again. I think it was the only time I ever saw him take up anything that was not truly himself.

In his time with us, we thoroughly enjoyed him, sharing life with us younger men. Always pleasant, accepting and supportive we could always go to him if we needed to. In his company, we felt a sense of peace, security, and deep acceptance, and always good humor. He was so good, that throughout his life, especially if the houses of formation went through difficult times, Dominic was always the "go to guy" to help bring order and peace to whichever house of formation he was assigned to.

During our scholasticate, he tried to make our courtesy and culture classes pleasant and never boring. We solved such serious problems as to whether we could eat French fries with our hands. Emily Post, our ultimate authority said "Yes." So we began to do this with gay abandon, perhaps even overdoing it, until one day, Br. Jerome West our director in his crisp no-nonsense nasal voice cried out loudly, "We don't eat French fries with our hands." And there was Brother Dominic eating French Fries with his hands also. As we all pointed to him, we had great fun seeing Dominic turn red, and our two superiors not in synch at the moment. All Brother Dominic did was smile and shrug his shoulders.

Br. Dominic was always a great second in command because in general he always supported the Director and worked hand in glove with him at the same time working with us. He was a great unifying force and created a cohesive community. He spent most of his life at Saint Mary's College, mostly as a professor of Latin and later theology, until he was asked by Br. Mel to become Academic Vice President of the College in the early '70s.

Courageous: He came in at a very difficult time for the College. Financially the College had very little money; He bravely came to an unpopular solution. One day he called the faculty to the Lefevre Theater for an important talk. Dominic came in dramatically with a brown paper bag. And proclaimed "These are the days of the brown paper bag,

no more fancy lunches. I am asking each faculty member to go from teaching six classes to teaching seven without any increase in pay. It was a bold and courageous move as he had to face what he thought would be an unpopular decision. Luckily the faculty understood the problem and wanted to help the College survive. His decision turned the finances of the college around to a solid footing. Here we observe that Dominic was not just a person that sought to please, but a serious, and courageous administrator taking firm stands and willing to face the displeasure of others if necessary.

Innovator: After Vatican II came on the scene, in the aftermath there was talk about renovating communities. He and a group of Brothers decided to try a noble experiment: create a smaller community with greater freedom, and an ambiance where people were encouraged to be themselves, work together in harmony and deal with poverty and obedience in new ways that were less onerous. The community, not the Director was to be the ultimate arbiter of community decisions and practices. Dominic and six brothers got permission to begin such a community which eventually resulted in the Joseph Alemany Community with Dominic as its first Director. He has always been one of the spiritual leaders of the community, without being director all the time. His wisdom, deep charity, and just good common sense plus a strong spirituality, have made him a great leader. He has always been a powerful cohesive force for the community. In recent years, I think we all reluctantly accepted the fact that one day he might have to leave us.

Two years ago he began to fall. Br. Michael Meister, our director didn't push him to come to Mont LaSalle but waited for Dominic to realize when that time came. And one day it did, at a special meeting Dominic paused silently, reluctantly, but then came out stating that he had to go to Mont LaSalle for special care, and burst out weeping because he didn't want to leave us. It was hard for all of us; I think inwardly we wept with him. Life would not be the same without him. We all loved him deeply. And now in death, we have lost him, but he awaits all of us where we ultimately will be with him forever in the great community of heaven, although I am sure he is with us right now. Thank you, Dom.

I want to conclude with a postscript. It is an intimate story, but I am sure, Sabas (my nickname for Dominic) will not mind because it says something profound. I once remarked, "Dominic, I bet you met a lovely rich widow or two who wanted to marry you. And he looked up

thoughtfully. "Yes, there was one," and he smiled wistfully. He might have made a sacrifice, but ultimately Dominic was a man of God, and a Brother to all of us; he chose to stay. To have left would have meant changing his Divine orientation and also his Brotherhood with us. With this incident, we must be grateful to Dominic for having chosen to stay with us and live the religious life focused on God as his conscious center and on us as his brothers. So for this, I say, "Thank you, Dominic, for having chosen God and us, your brothers, in the latter part of your life. Because you made a profound and wondrous difference and made us all happier."

I conclude with a paraphrase of a poem by Federico García Lorca, a Spanish poet, writing about the death of his friend, Ignacio Sánchez Mejías, who met an early and tragic death

"It will be a long time before there is born if ever, a Brother
so distinguished and rich in humanity.

I sing of his wonder in words that weep
And remember a sad breeze that whispers his name
Through the redwood trees.

Dominic: *requiescat in pace, frater noster.*