



Br. Brutus J. Clay, SJ
April 2, 2008
Grand Blanc, Michigan

Br. Brutus J. Clay, a Jesuit brother of many talents best known for his prayerful humility, died Wednesday, April 2, at Genesys Hospital in Grand Blanc, MI. For 58 years, he served wherever he was needed in the Society of Jesus. His journey took him from the Kentucky farmland of his youth to the Jesuit Curia in Rome, the Xavier University Jesuit Community in Cincinnati, Canisius Secondary School in Chikuni, Zambia, and the Loyola University Chicago Jesuit Community. In 2003, he retired to the Colombiere Jesuit Community in Clarkston, MI. Br. Clay was 90 years old.

“Br. Clay was a very dedicated and industrious worker,” explains Fr. Daniel Flaherty, SJ, who knew Clay for nearly sixty years. “When he joined the Jesuits at the age of 32, he brought with him a lot of valuable experience from his family’s horse and coal businesses and his time in the U.S. Army Air Corps. Along with that he had a wonderful, easygoing personality with a Kentucky accent that everyone tried to imitate.”

Fr. Patrick McGrath, SJ, recalls one of his favorite Br. Clay stories: “When I was a scholastic studying philosophy at Loyola University, Br. Brutus was the sacristan for our community and was always in the chapel either caring for it or praying. One morning I happened to be in the chapel very early when he came in, walked right up to the tabernacle, and said aloud with his great accent, ‘Good morning, Lord!’ It was very natural—he was just saying hello to a friend he knew so well. That was Br. Brutus, a Kentucky gentleman of the first order.”

Br. Brutus Clay was born in Atlanta, GA, and grew up in Kentucky and Maryland. He attended St. Mary’s Parochial School in Paris, KY, Mt. Washington Country School in Baltimore, and Versailles and Paris Public Schools in KY. He graduated from Georgetown Prep in Garret Park, MD, in 1937 and then entered Holy Cross College. After graduating from Holy Cross in 1941 with a BA in English, he served the U.S. Army Air Corps as an airplane mechanic from 1942 to 1945 and then tried his hand at farming for another three years. He joined the Jesuits at the Milford, OH, novitiate in 1949.

Br. Clay served in the house library at West Baden College for three years beginning in 1953 before

being assigned to work in the Society’s General Curia in Rome as the Brother Secretary for the American Assistancy from 1956 to 1969. For the next five years he served as the Brother Secretary for the Chicago Province staff in Oak Park, IL. From 1974 to 1980 he was assigned to serve the Xavier University Jesuit community as guest master, secretary, and health insurance agent.

“Br. Clay was an excellent Jesuit and wanted to put his talents at the service of others,” says Fr. Flaherty. “In his sixties he volunteered to go to Africa to offer his business skills and experience to Canisius Secondary School in Zambia.” From 1980 to 1987, Br. Clay was bursar of the school and sacristan.

When he returned to Chicago for what would be his longest assignment, Br. Clay joined Loyola University Chicago’s Jesuit community and served as an assistant in the rector’s office, house sacristan, and library assistant. “Br. Brutus was a holy man,” explains Fr. Ray Baumhart, former president of Loyola University. “He liked to be the sacristan and was very detail-oriented and conscientious. He was very prayerful, and we always made sure he was aware of people’s prayer requests to the Jesuits. He was a good monk.”

“Everyone loved Br. Brutus,” says Fr. McGrath. “He got along with people of all ages and walks of life. I especially enjoyed his stories of serving Fr. General Pedro Arrupe, SJ, in Rome, or the people of Zambia because they illustrated what it means to be a dedicated Jesuit willing to serve wherever there is a need.”

Being a horseman from Kentucky, Br. Clay was also a crowd favorite around the time of the Kentucky Derby. Fr. Baumhart recalls, “We used to play up to him around Derby time because he tracked horses and always had his favorites. Then the day after the Derby he’d explain why his choice didn’t win!”

In 2003, Br. Clay retired to Colombiere Center in Clarkston, MI, where he served as sacristan and prayed for the Church and Society until his death. ■

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