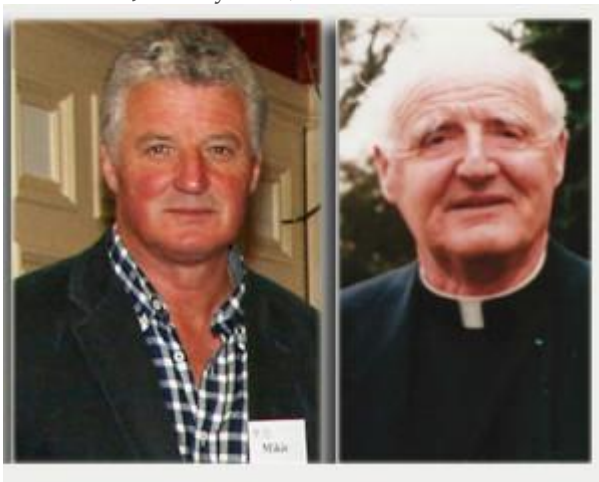


A Time For Everything – A tribute to the Late Fr. Denis Costello

Posted on January 17th, 2016.



Mikie O'Connor writing of bonds and fond memories of his late uncle, Fr. Denis Costello.

On Sunday, January 3rd. Rev Fr Denis Costello (92) passed away at Fatima Nursing Home in Tralee where he had resided for the last 13 years. There, he enjoyed the extraordinary care and affection of the wonderful staff in great peace and comfort.

A Tribute by Mikie O'Connor.

Fr. Denis was born in Castleisland in 1924 the second eldest of four children – a brother to John, Con and Mary.

His father, William 'Jack Bill' Costello was better known as 'Bill Cushley' was one of a family of 12 from Kilsarcon where his cousins the McMahons now farm. His mother was Mary-Ann (Marian) Brosnan from Tullig known as the 'John Joes' who still farm there.

Pub Come Shop

Fr. Denis was born into a 'pub come shop' at 43 Main Street. Bill 'Cushley' was a well-known wit and wrote the Castleisland notes for the Kerryman for years.

On one occasion when he was asked by a stranger 'is this the main street' he replied 'it is indeed and the further you go up the mainer it gets'. On another occasion when a woman looking for a book went into his shop asked him if he had The Life of St. Paul he replied 'my dear woman I've the life of a dog'.

Fr Denis would have inherited that sense of fun and wit. His mother passed away in 1940 when he was only 16 years of age. He received his secondary education in St. Brendans or *The Sem* where he spent five years and excelled as a sportsman and a student.

Munster Colleges Medal

He won a Munster colleges medal with the senior football team. A neighbour from Main Street in Castleisland Fr. Jack Heffernan remembers Fr. Denis having a mighty leap for a ball and powerful left leg.

He went on to wear green and gold for the Kerry juniors. After completing his leaving cert, Fr. Denis went to Maynooth to study for the priesthood. He excelled there as an academic and was later offered a lecturer's position in the college.

He played on the Maynooth football team with such luminaries as former government minister John Wilson – whom Fr. Denis described as a genius and brilliant footballer.

Returned to The Sem

After he graduated and was ordained he returned to *The Sem* to teach. Monsignor Dan O'Riordan P.P Castleisland recalls how Fr. Denis once thought him and later thought with him.

Fr Denis was a greatly loved and brilliant teacher.

Affectionately known Wag a name he inherited from his older brother, John – who was actually called 'waxy' as he had red hair and a quick temper. Fr.Denis was revered by his pupils and never had to resort to corporal remedies.

His most extreme sanction for a distracted student might be 'Read your Beano boy.' You could hear a pin drop in his classes as his pupils were held enthralled by his exuberance for and mastery of the English language.

Unique Approach

He also trained the senior football team at *The Sem* and had a unique approach to that role. Former Kerry captain Johnny Culloty said that Fr. Costello was a thinking coach and was ahead of his time. He certainly was not 'a win at all costs coach.'

Before one Munster senior championship game his pep talk was short: "If ye win that will be great if ye lose that will be fine too," – a quote Dan Dwyer of Kilcummin.

Fr. Pat Horgan a contemporary of Fr. Costello's tells the story of how a colleague remarked on how disappointing it was that *The Sem* lost the championship game the day before and Fr. Denis, quite calmly, said "Sure they might do better next year."

Missions to Peru

After 20 years teaching in *The Sem* Fr. Denis went on the missions to Peru and it is here his great friend Fr. Luke Roche believes that Fr.Denis was the happiest. The priest lived in poor neighbourhoods and shanty towns with the people and he loved their dignity and resilience.

While in South America he organised many trips to places like Chile, Argentina, Ecuador, and Columbia. These were working holidays. Fr. Denis would research assiduously and make sure no important historical and natural attractions were missed.

"It was like having your own personal tour guide," Fr. Roche said.

Thousands of Photographs

During his time at *The Sem* he had travelled extensively throughout Europe and took thousands of photographs. Many of these he converted to slide form. As children his nieces and nephews loved

nothing better than to have uncle Denis set up his slide shows and talk them through the wonderful places and things he had captured on camera.

After his time on the missions he returned to take up a curate's post in Kiskeam/Boherbue where he is remembered as a tall grey haired, gentle natured, soft spoken man.

From there he transferred to Valentia Island where he was served Parish Priest. In fact the Island's most famous resident, Mick O'Connell travelled to Castleisland for Fr. Costello's funeral mass on January 6th.

A Wonderful Posting

As a man who loved nature and, in particular, bird-life – it was a wonderful posting. Again' he loved the people there. He often spoke of the community spirit in Valentia. Maybe because it was once cut off from the mainland. He would say there was a great serenity, calmness and a lack of fuss about the people there.

From Valentia he returned to the mainland and the more urban as Parish Priest of Ardfert.

However he was still close to the sea which he loved and rarely missed a day to stroll in Banna and observe the wild birds. He had a particular interest in the wild geese perhaps they represented the passing of the seasons and the circle of life.

Caring Disposition

Primary school Principal Ms. Betty Stack spoke of his gentleness and calmness his soft voice and caring disposition. Small children would flock around him in the school yard. He knew how to talk to children. He was never above them. Fr. Tom Looney who worked as a curate in Ardfert always refers to him as Denis – this is what he would want and he never felt he was above anyone in status or station.

Next to his fireside arm chair in the Presbytery in Ardfert mountains of books on history, nature, biographies, geography anything and everything yet always close by him and often in his hand was his Bible.

He exuded calmness and gentleness as Ms. Stack said "t was like as if he knew what it was all about."

Annoyed or Angry

"If you were annoyed or angry about something he might say 'by gosh' don't worry too much – these things have a way of working themselves out you know."

Fr. Denis Costello was a man who knew that God had set eternity in the human heart. He understood the big plan Ecclesiastes 3 'Everything really in its own time.'

Rev. Fr. Denis Costello was finally laid to rest with his father Bill and his mother Marian just inside the wall in the old Kilbanivane Cemetery (Pemborke's) in Castleisland on Wednesday, January 6th 2016. Ar Deis Dé go Raibh a Anam. – His loving nephew Mikie O'Connor.