

Fr. Reuter at 93: Fullness of life, love

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Contributor

WHEN JAMES B. REUTER was just 7 years old, “God made a spectacular entrance into [his] life,” and he made the decision that would set the course of his existence.

“I was in second grade and heard the nuns talking about the missions. This struck me as attractive so I said I would be a missionary.”



**Fr. James B. Reuter,
S.J.: TIMELESS**

At age 18, Reuter entered the Society of Jesus, and in 1938, just four years later, he was sent as a Jesuit scholastic to study philosophy in the Philippines.

Reuter, who celebrated his 93rd birthday on May 21, reflects back on this moment that he describes as the “highlight” of his long life.

“See, everything comes from God, once God gets inside of you everything that follows is good,” he says.

What followed was the building of a life in the Philippines, a life that is a rainbow of stories, with each of the roles he has played standing in brilliant color, and the sum of it all blending into one beautiful image.

Reuter has left an indelible imprint on the lives of the legions who have crossed his path—friends, students, glee club singers, Ateneo athletes, confidants, co-workers and

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cast members in the dramas and musicals which he regularly produced and directed.

Radyo Bandido

As the former director of the National Office of Mass Media for the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, director of the Radyo Bandido broadcasts of June Keithley during the 1986 EDSA People Power Revolution, and organizer of the "Reuter babies" to help monitor the snap elections in 1986, Reuter has also left his mark on Philippine history.

Although he has given an abundance of himself and his love to this country and taught many people many things, he says that the Philippines has given him even more.

It was his curiosity and desire to help other cultures that led him here, but Reuter chose to make the Philippines his home because he believes that Filipinos are the most loving people in the world.

"When they love it is with their whole being, their mind, heart and soul—something even beyond that reaches out to you. It's not just words and it's not just a passing thing. They have a talent for affection that is unique in all the world and this ability to love is a blessing that God gave to this country and its people."

Secret of sanctity

He says the secret of sanctity, of serving God, and of living is loving people.

"If you don't love people you don't do what God wants you to do," he says.

Filipinos never had to learn this, however, as they were born with this gift of reaching out to others, he says.

Reuter has filled many roles in his life—priest, teacher, counselor, friend, sports coach, singing coach—and he

believes that lessons in living were equally if not much more important.

In all of his activities, Reuter has focused on people being able to have "the fullness of life"—when you enjoy everything that you do, reach out to others to help them, and everybody then tries to reach out to you.

"It is where you believe life itself is a gift and every moment of every day is a joy to be thankful for. Sometimes it's a greater gift to fail than to succeed, so even sickness and adversity are to be appreciated," he explains.

Secrets of long life

Reuter credits his lifelong love of athletics as one of the reasons he has retained his good mental and "relatively good" physical shape at age 93.

"At 14, I was a distance runner and I loved it, I ran just for the joy of it. Then I was wrapped up in athletics, and became captain of the Protestant church basketball team," he remembers.

Never having smoked or been "tempted by women" were other factors, he says with a smile.

"I was never hungry for women in the way that would lead me to commit sin. When I was growing up, I thought if I loved a girl, I would die for her, but I would not marry her, because marriage involves sex, which was taking, rather than giving. I later learned that was a mistake, because when you're married, it's mutual giving and sharing."

So his advice for a long life is: "Don't ever stop. Use the body as much as possible but you have to keep your mind active. Keep thinking, keep trying."

"The mind is funny that way, that when you use it, it stays alert and gets stronger, when

considers it a blessing that he enjoyed them all.

"Whatever I was asked to do officially, I really liked. Some people find it very hard because they are commanded to do something they really don't like, but I enjoyed it all," he says.

His work as a teacher was especially rewarding because he could give and develop and see young people grow.

Best role

The priesthood, however, is the role he has learned the most from.

"A priest is supposed to be a bridge between God and man, and that's the most beautiful thing in my life. Becoming one was a gift from God and there is nothing more beautiful than bringing what God stands for to people," he said.

He also enjoyed acting as a counselor to the many couples who would go to Xavier House in Santa Ana, his residence for the past 40 years, asking for advice.

"I had a kind of a talent of getting people together, making people realize how much marriage meant if they were giving themselves to each other and to God. Bringing them to the point where they would recognize the love they had for each other and teaching them to love each other simply because of who they each were and not because of virtues or achievements was the heart of his message to them," he says.

Spreading God's word

Using extracurricular activities like theater, sports, choral singing and debate to spread his message was one of the many ways in which Reuter touched people's lives.

"You could get your lessons across footlights better than you could do from the pulpit. In coaching, for instance, you get more through to the boy, in all ways, than you get in the classroom. He learns much more on the basketball court," he says.

His work in the classroom taught mainly "facts," but he

you stop using it, you disappear."

Being always optimistic will make you live longer, he says.

Filipinos' positive thinkers

"I learned the vital importance of thinking positive after I came here. I learned it from the people of the Philippines. Everything always has a positive side, always."

"If you're negative, and don't like someone, you lose something there, you are depleted by what you dislike. But if I like you, the good things that I like in you, will come back to me and in greater quantities."

New residence

Reuter has moved out of Xavier House and is now living at the Our Lady of Peace Mission Hospital.

He leads a much less active life now but believes that God will give you the things that He wants you to do day by day and that you do not have to look for them.

"I don't necessarily think there is a purpose to my living this long ... I'd like to stay in the Philippines because every Filipino that I have ever tried to help remembers it with love, and even if I can't give them back anything, they are grateful until they die."

Birthday wish

His face shows the beautiful wrinkles of time, but when he gets excited, his smile and sparkling blue eyes give a glimpse of the youthful boy still inside of him.

When asked what his birthday wish would be, he answered with the clarity of someone who is about to close his eyes and blow the candles out.

"I wish for universal peace in the Philippines. That would be peace of soul, peace of mind, peace of heart, and peace in everything they do."

"And I wish for a leader who thinks of the good of the people and not his own good, someone who thinks of the next generation and not the next election, and wants to give rather than take ..."