



# SSS Grapevine

An Internal Publication of the Province of Saint Ann,  
Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament for the  
Eymardian Family

**October 17, 2023 – 2023.17**

## **Funeral Homily for Brother James Eugene Blee SSS** *Religious of the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament*



**Regina Health Center Holy Family Chapel  
Monday, October 16, 2023, 11:00 AM  
By John Thomas Lane SSS, Provincial**

**READINGS:** 2 Maccabees 12:43-46  
Psalm 122: Let us Go Rejoicing (Joncas version)  
Philippians 3:20-21  
John 6:51-59

I met Brother Eugene Blee at my first Blessed Sacrament Community Chapter in April 1988 in Burlingame, California. I was a novice, and like so many of the Blessed Sacrament religious at that time, Brother Gene opened and welcomed me with open arms. On one of our free days, Fr Jim Hayes, Sr Edna Cordoza, and Brother Eugene invited me to see the Sequoia National Forest and spend the day with them. Immediately, we bonded and had a special friendship due to our Irish heritage. He was always so interested in my family and had many questions and discussions. Later on, we became pen pals during my seminary days, and he would want to know what I was studying while he lived out in California working in his various apostolates with young people. We reacquainted when he moved to Ohio and especially when I came to serve as pastor at Saint Paschal Baylon in Highland Heights in 2009. He loved the parish and was so happy and proud that I was the pastor, treating me as a proud parent and telling me daily, “You have a big job, and you keep that great smile of yours.”

I learned this subtle, lucky Irish charm had this way with everyone, from parishioners in the pews, youth in prison, the Knights of Columbus, and everyone

from here to Ireland. Recently, on learning of his passing, some of his friends from Ireland contacted me and shared the greatness of this sweet Irish gentleman. He was like Judas in our first reading from the Book of Maccabees. Gene would “take up a collection” of stories and treasures from the different people he met and would share them with others; his interest in care – but especially the way he said he would pray for you – and he meant it and prayed for you – made you feel like you were blessed and receiving a blessed reward with his gift of presence—a real presence like that of Christ, making you feel so important and valued.

When in the years here at Regina, I would visit him on my day off, then later, as superior and provincial, he would always read the Bible, some religious magazine, some Eucharistic piece, something he wanted to discuss briefly. He never lost his desire to learn and grow in our Eucharistic spirituality. That’s why I chose the numbers from our *Rule of Life* in his funeral booklet with him. He believed and lived, as we know in *Rule of Life* 22, that:

*The community’s faith is nourished daily, and its unity deepened at the table of the Word of God.*

*The celebration of the Word in the liturgy provides a special opportunity for those who seek the LORD.*

*This Word, which the Spirit causes to resonate in our innermost being, challenges us in ever new ways. When shared fraternally, and according to our capacity to receive it, the Word enlightens us and incorporates us into the mystery of Christ.*

He loved to lector and proclaim God’s word to the best of his abilities. He would mediate on it and ensure he was living it in his heart. He enjoyed the peace of this place, which allowed him to ponder and live like Mary, his blessed mother and friend.

The Eucharist was everything for Gene. The Mass and all the mysteries of the Eucharist meant so much, knowing that he would have the gift of eternal life and the comfort of the LORD feeding and nourishing him. He hungered for the Bread of Life and the Blood of Christ each day: the pandemic was hard on him when he could not receive Holy Communion as before. He made due comments about those suffering in the world and how he would offer it up for them.

Gene enjoyed receiving the Bread of Life and the Cup of Blessing. He loved the Eucharist, would enjoy ***and thrive*** at serving the Mass, and enjoyed his prayer time in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament and the rosary. He loved to watch his Regina channel or be in the chapel as often as possible. Usually, I would come

into his bedroom with the Regina Channel on, just viewing the tabernacle and hearing/reciting the “Divine Mercy Chaplet” and rosary. He would then go from this place (Regina), as one of Regina’s longest residents and ambassadors, and be with the Knights of Columbus at Assumption parish or some other place around northeast Ohio. **He got around** and was well-known for his smile, kindness, and care. He lived to socialize with people and engage in their lives – **especially when he could hear their conversation.**

I was always touched that this man who blessed me so much would always ask me for a blessing when I would leave him and proudly say my title to others as he escorted me to the elevator: “This is my pastor; this is my superior;” and his favorite this past year, “This is my friend and provincial.”

Gene was humble but incredibly proud of the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament, its members, and its mission. He was proud to be the age he became. He was proud of his Eymardian Family and seeing how it was growing, especially with our reaching out internationally again, like when the Congregation from America reached out to him and took him so that he could serve in our seminaries, parishes and Saint Ann Shrine. He was proud to work for vocation ministry and encourage people.

As the elder of the province, he leads us “rejoicing to the house of the LORD.” Gene knew that while he lived in his body for 95 years, it was a temporary reality; and while he suffered from his lack of sight and hearing, and in these past few months the pain of his feet, he never allowed that to get in the way of wanting the LORD to call him to his true “citizenship of heaven.” He always felt that Ireland and the people around him were a little touch of heaven. But he longed to be released from his aging body to be in the fullness of the LORD’s presence in heaven: The fullness of the Word of God made flesh, the fullness of the heavenly banquet that he witnessed in his life, the fullness of God’s glory where the mystery of the Eucharist is in its fullness.

We say to him, who was such a faithful religious for 66 years of service across the globe: **Thank you, Gene!** And as Rick Coyne, one of Gene’s friends, told me, “No one better prepared to go to heaven than Brother Eugene.”

We know God is saying to him, **“Well done, good and faithful servant! Come, share your master’s joy!”**



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