

Homily at Mass of Christian Burial
Fr. Leonard Elder, SCJ
Born - August 19, 1941- Born to Eternal Life - March 6, 2018

Dear Friends,

We gather this evening to commend to the Lord the soul of our brother, Fr. Leonard Elder, who faithfully loved his family and served his Religious Congregation and the People of God as a Priest of the Sacred Heart for more than 51 years.

To Father Lenny's brothers and sisters, his nieces and nephews, and their families, we extend to you our deepest sympathies on the loss of your brother and uncle. The Elder family has been very generous to the Priests of the Sacred Heart, having shared your brother with us and with the Church.

Lenny was also a brother to us, as we gather to celebrate his life and remember his love. Our religious brotherhood, as sons of Fr. Dehon, is a special bond that unites us all to Lenny; it is a bond of solidarity and communion, and it is expressed in a powerful way through this celebration of the Eucharist. This special bond is with the love of the Lord, that St. Paul tells us, "*There is nothing that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" Not even death itself.

Fr. Lenny, as so many have commented, was A QUIET MAN, A SIMPLE MAN, a GENTLE MAN, did so many things in his seventy-six years. Some say he was a PEACEFUL MAN, having never seen him get angry or even raise his voice.

Raised on the family farm in Fancy Farm, Kentucky, Fr. Leonard attended Divine Heart Seminary in Donaldson, IN, and entered the novitiate with the intention of pursuing ordained ministry. But instead of professing his first vows, he enlisted in the U.S. Air Force. In some ways, his time of military service was an extended period of discernment. After four years with the Air Force he said “I asked to return to the community as a religious brother.” He professed his first vows in 1967.

As a brother, he served **in formation** as the Director of the Brothers Program at Sacred Heart Monastery and then as Associate Novice Master in Victorville, California. It was in that first Novitiate Class in Baileys Harbor and Victorville, CA in 1974, that I first met Brother Lenny. It was as a Brother that he taught many of us the Spirituality and Charism of our Founder, Leo John Dehon. It was also in the novitiate **that he taught me** how to bale hay and waterski on Kangaroo Lake. (I never took up golf though.) **It was as a brother** that he touched the lives of so many young SCJs.

Then for nine years he served **as a missionary** in Zaire (now, the Democratic Republic of Congo). It was in Africa that Leonard once again felt the call to ordained ministry. “God, through the voices of many people where I served, called me to pursue studies for the priesthood,” he said. **It was as a missionary** that he touched the life of the people of the Congo.

Fr. Leonard said that what he enjoyed most about his years in Africa “were the challenges; learning new cultures, languages (he often joked how he spoke French with a Kentucky accent); and the daily struggles to overcome the lack of almost everything I was accustomed to using. However, joined with those challenges was discovering a people eager to celebrate God’s love and to share in their lives and struggles.”

He returned to the States and earned his Master of Divinity Degree at Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology. He was ordained on May 16, 1996.

Following ordination, Fr. Leonard served **in pastoral ministry** at parishes in Houston, and at St. Joseph's parish in Mississippi, where he continued to live in retirement while doing part-time parish ministry. **It was in his ministry as a priest that that he touched the lives of the "people of God"** through the Word and the sacraments.

We recall, this evening the things he did in service and love as a brother and priest. Certainly in the days and months ahead, we, his family, friends and community will find solace and consolation in remembering the many kindnesses he extended to us over the years. For now, let it suffice just for us to say: Leonard Elder was a good shepherd – a quiet and gentle Priest of the Sacred Heart.

So we invoke God's loving mercy on his soul and ask for him the joy and peace of eternal life in the communion of the saints in heaven. We pray in gratitude for his faith, for his long years of service, and for his perseverance in his vocation.

We join in the prayer of the communion of the saints for Father Lenny and for all our other brothers in the province who have gone before us: we trust that our prayers will accompany them as they journey home to the Lord. We pray confidently, comforted by the words of St. Paul: "nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Yes, we thank God for the perseverance of this faithful man and we are convinced that God's promise to him is fulfilled in the gift of

everlasting life.

For Fr. Lenny— like for each of us as SCJs— so much of his daily life revolved around the Eucharist. In the Eucharist, he proclaimed Christ’s promises; he accepted and believed the words of Jesus — that eternal life is the gift that the Eucharist brings.

Jesus said: “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.” The Christ whom he adored in adoration and hidden in the host he was privileged to hold in his hands during Mass, he now contemplates face to face.

A song that occasionally we have the opportunity to sing in the liturgy has the refrain: “We remember, we celebrate, we believe.” Today, as we celebrate this Eucharist for the repose of his soul, **we too remember, we celebrate, we believe.**

It is that enduring belief and trust in God’s promises that gives us hope. While we recall so many wonderful aspects of Lenny Elder’s life and ministry, his most precious gift was that he pointed us towards God, and called us to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus—our way, our truth, and our life.

Amen.

-Fr. Edward Kilianski, SCJ
Provincial Superior, US Province
Priests of the Sacred Heart (Dehonians)