



Father William Russell James

June 5, 1929 - June 6, 2019

REVEREND MONSIGNOR WILLIAM RUSSELL JAMES was a prolific writer. He once wrote “the thought of death is a happy thought for me. What an exciting time when Gabriel blows his heavenly trumpet ... and we have that journey of all journeys, and happily, gather in heaven to experience forever the sight of God - the Beatific Vision. Forever, forever.” In another writing, Father James wrote of welcoming death because of the excitement of “soaring past the stars through heaven” to see the true glory and scope of God’s universe. Father James began his soaring flight through heaven on Thursday, June 6, one day after his ninetieth birthday.

Father James was born on June 5, 1929 in Birmingham, Alabama. He was the second of five children born to Russell William James and Marian (Welsh) James. His early education was at St. Paul’s Catholic School in downtown Birmingham. At age 16, he began seminary training with the Benedictine Monks at St. Bernard Abbey in Cullman, Alabama. His seminary studies continued at Mount St. Mary’s Seminary in Emmitsburg, Maryland. He was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Mobile on May 27, 1954 at St. Paul’s Cathedral in Birmingham.

While teaching at McGill Institute in Mobile, Alabama, he completed his Master’s Degree in Education from Catholic University in Washington, D.C. He served as Assistant Superintendent of Schools and Diocesan Director of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine during the 1960s. He was Associate Pastor at Little Flower in Mobile and, while serving at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Mobile, he received the title of Monsignor. He also served as Pastor of St. Francis of Xavier in Mobile in the late 1960s. After teaching at the City of St. Jude in Montgomery, Alabama during the early 1970s, he became Pastor and Administrator of St. Jude from 1978-1989. The City of St. Jude, a multi-faceted community, was established in 1934 by Passionist Father Purcell. St. Jude’s goal was to serve young people, the area’s poor, and the severely handicapped with hope and dignity which Father James avidly pursued.

Father James also served as Vicar for Religious and Family Life Director for the Diocese of Mobile from 1965-1992. He was always involved in the Apostolate for the Deaf, having learned sign language during his seminary training. From 1989-1992, he was Pastor of Mother Mary Parish in Phenix City, Alabama.

Father James was aggressive in his involvement in the civil rights movement and his efforts toward social justice. He was on the site of and an immediate witness to the aftermath of the 1963 bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham that killed four young girls. During the 1960s, he marched in many civil rights protests throughout the State and spent his nights in jail for having done so. He also marched with Cesar Chavez in California for the rights of Hispanic migrant workers in California. His work continued as he traveled this country for many years leading hundreds of retreats for Catholic nuns, acknowledging and promoting the vital role the Sisters play in the Church. He was a man on a mission, many missions. During those travels, he stopped most days to watch the glory of God's sunset, many times with camera in hand. As he traveled, he also stayed in contact with his many cousins around the country. He loved and cherished the relationships of his large extended family.

Father James' last assignment was as Pastor of St. Patrick's Church in Robertsdale, Alabama from 1993-2011. He loved St. Patrick's parish and its people and they loved him. They were family. After his retirement, he resided in the parish community and continued his priestly ministry when and where he was needed. As of the time of his death, Father James was the longest serving priest in the Mobile Diocese.

Surviving Father James are his brother, Dr. Thomas O'Conner James (Ann) of Birmingham, and his sister, Margaret James Borders (Ray) of Shelton, Connecticut. He was predeceased by his sister and brother in law Patricia James Thornton and William L. Thornton, Jr. of Birmingham and by his brother Monsignor Robert Joseph James, a priest of the Diocese of St. Augustine, Florida. His numerous cousins, nieces, nephews, grand and great nieces and nephews will miss his presence at many family occasions and his example of service to his parishes and to those in need in our society. He was the shepherd for so many. Father James is also survived by his steadfast partner through thick and thin for so many years, Sister Margaret Harte, the principal of St. Patrick's School. Together, he and Sister Margaret carried out their honorable mission and forged a St. Patrick's community that is salt of the earth.

Thanks to Father James Morrison, Pastor of St. Patrick's, for his kindness and support. A special thanks to his niece, Mary Thornton Taylor, for oversight. But above all else, the family is particularly grateful to St. Patrick's parish and its faithful community for their love, support and caregiving of Father James for these many years. The mutual bond between him and his Church community is a testament of good people taking care of each other and following in Christ's footsteps.

On Friday June 7, 2019, the Office for the Dead will occur at St. Patrick's from 6:00 to 7:00 p.m. On Saturday, June 8, 2019, the Funeral Mass will begin at 11:00 a.m. at St. Patrick's. Prior to the Funeral Mass, the family and Church family will receive friends at the Church beginning at 10:00 a.m. Pallbearers in Robertsdale will be Kip Dye, Mike Van, Kasey Childress, Charles Pinkert, Greg Wittendorfer, and August Eltz, Jr. Honorary pallbearers

will be St. Patrick's Knights of Columbus. Immediately after the Funeral Mass, the parish is hosting a celebration of a life well lived in the parish hall. All guests are invited.

On Monday, June 10, 2019, Father James will be buried near his family in Elmwood Cemetery in Birmingham. Graveside services will be held at 2:00 p.m. Pallbearers in Birmingham will be his family members.

Robertsdale services are under the direction of Mack Funeral Home in Robertsdale. Graveside services in Birmingham are under the direction of Ridout's Valley Chapel in Homewood.

Cemetery

Events

Elmwood Cemetery

Birmingham, AL,

JUN 7 Office for the Dead 06:00PM - 07:00PM

St. Patrick's Catholic Church
23035 Hwy. 59 N, Robertsdale, AL, US, 36567

JUN 8 Visitation 10:00AM - 11:00AM

St. Patrick's Catholic Church
23035 Hwy. 59 N, Robertsdale, AL, US, 36567

JUN 8 Funeral Mass 11:00AM

St. Patrick's Catholic Church
23035 Hwy. 59 N, Robertsdale, AL, US, 36567

Comments



“ It was with great pleasure that we got to meet such a beautiful person, in fact Fr. James was part of our family here in Ireland. Aunty Margaret will really miss you as ye were such good friends but im sure you will look after her from up there in Heaven.. May You Rest In Peace Fr. Bill, Love from all your Irish Family xxx

Lorna O Driscoll - June 10 at 02:42 AM



“ Bucky Cooper lit a candle in memory of Father William Russell James



Bucky Cooper - June 08 at 01:40 AM