

21 August

**Fr KEVIN DONOVAN** 26 September 1931 – 21 August 2008



Kevin spent little more than a year of his 77 years in Zimbabwe but he packed all his gifts and energy into that year as he did everywhere. His mother was French and he was born in Montrécourt in northern France. His father died when Kevin was ten months old and his mother had to raise her only child on her own. ‘She was a remarkable woman with a strong sense of purpose’, Gerry J Hughes tells us, ‘As she faced the challenge ... she also had a

sparkling, very French, élan, an artistic flair combined with a lively sense of fun. It is not hard to see she passed on these characteristics to Kevin.’

Kevin went to school at Beaumont and joined the Society in 1949. His Gallic charm and sense of fun soon showed and his conversation sparkled, with or without his flute, a constant companion. (The photo shows Kevin with his flute while celebrating a nuptial Mass on the day he died). He had moods when he felt down but he would overcome these through his strong friendship with fellow Jesuits. In the days when we were encouraged to share our lives with one another, Michael O Halloran tells us, Kevin did so in a deep personal way and even with tears.

Michael continues, Kevin discovered a nonsense word, *phlattothrat*, in his Champion Hall study of Greek and Latin (Greats) – it comes from a play by Aristophanes - and he liked to use it about many of the lectures he endured. It means ‘sound without sense’! Kevin also played the guitar and Michael remembers the ‘sheer beauty’ of his accompanying himself singing *Chante, Rossignol, chante*. An old Beaumont boy remembers ‘Kevin was one of the brightest stars in the Jesuit firmament – quite out of the ordinary...’ This writer remembers him singing *Deo de Deo* with Tony Richmond with great passion in the old Heythrop and after communion at my first Mass he sang *Ubi caritas* in a way our little Co Tipperary parish never heard before and will never hear again.

Based at St Ignatius, Chishawasha, Kevin poured out his talents there and in the seminary down the hill. Despite his great ability he came to know he was not an

academic and after years of lecturing in liturgy he settled into parish work at St Ignatius and later Wimbledon. Gerry Hughes tells us he used his great gifts in those parishes and gives an example. In an infants' class a six-year-old asked him if God loves the devil. There was a moment's pause and Kevin replied, 'I think God does love the devil but the devil has forgotten that God loves him'. Gerry comments, 'The serious theology is there – there is nothing at all that the kids would ever have to unlearn – but it is transformed.'

When Leo Amani was looking for professors to start up ITCJ in Abidjan, Kevin 'was the only one among so many who saw the need and went out of his way to come and help us ... he had a ken mind and quickly adapted himself to our situation even going around among the villages at week-ends'.

Michael Barnes remembers how Kevin helped him start *Faiths Together* and he was asked to talk about ritual in religions. 'It would be wrong to call it a lecture. It was just Kevin – at his ebullient best ... the group was enthralled by this elemental force of nature. Towards the end, casting caution to the winds, Kevin decided to demonstrate what he meant. We ended up, Christians, Muslima and our one Buddhist, kneeling on the floor, arms outstretched, bowing and prostrating. The ice was broken and people started engaging with one another as never before.

Gerry Hughes concluded, 'For all his abilities ... Kevin had more than a tinge of self-doubt. I vividly remember asking him how a talk he gave had gone. It was, he said 'another sickening success', as if he himself could not believe in the in the gifts everyone else could see. Nobody who knew Kevin at all well could possibly think his life had been an easy one. He died suddenly at a wedding reception on Wimbledon Common and was buried at Garth Road next to Tony Montfort, long-time (40 years) director of Jesuit Missions in London.