

A blast From The Past

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In This Mighty Band Of Brothers, They're All Superstars!

By Father John McGowan, C.Ss.R.

Once a month I celebrate Mass in La Salle Hall ? a convalescent home on the far end of the Christian Brothers Academy property in Lincroft.

The Brothers staff this nursing facility for their sick, retired and elderly confreres.

About two dozen brothers with a combined experience of tens of thousand of teaching years behind them crowd into the bright chapel. The chapel has no pews ? just a few straight back chairs with strong wooden arms for those who can walk and plenty of floor space for different sized wheel chairs.

The Brothers, their bodies now broken, stooped and scarred by the harm of the years, semi-circle the small wooden altar table. Most of them are living out their days one at a time, praying, preparing for their own final exams and relishing memories of classrooms filled with the young faces they taught, inspired and even saved.

It is quite a humbling experience to stand at the altar and look out at these men. Here they all gather, stooped and bent, in wheelchairs, one or two unaware of where they are, one dozing, another speechless from a stroke, another oxygenated with a plastic mask.

It is impossible to calculate the number of generations they spent studying and teaching, the classrooms

they peopled, the mountains of white chalk they scratched across quarries of slate.

How many millions of words did these men speak in explaining and re-explaining fractions, theorems, diagrams, rhymes, principles and conjugations?

Imagine the forests of papers they read, corrected and graded in red, black or blue.

Talk about your greatest generation!

Where did their likes come from?

They came out of immigrant streets and farms, from public and parish schools, from lunch-pail laborers and rosary-fingering mothers./They came from Sisters, Brothers and teachers who role-modeled them with a hunger to teach and a love of young people.

So they went off dressed in a black habit with a white starched bib below the chin to the classrooms of our cities to convince other young men that they too could make it, they could learn,

they could succeed and become who they were made to be.

And in their years they populated universities, the professions and the arts with their students.

They sent their young pupils to altars, to cathedrals, to board rooms, to governors' mansions and to homes where they husbanded and fathered fine families.

The 24 old men nod at my greeting and bless themselves. I wonder will we ever see their likes again.

So I look deeply and I can see the multitudes behind them.

The millions they taught, tutored, mentored and loved.

I can see the Body of Christ behind them? The tens of thousands of lives they touched and bettered. Talk about your heroes, your headline makers, your superstars.

These men were the franchise of Catholic education.

They left no monuments, no memorials.

They wrote on men's hearts and in the minds of young children sublime truths.

Now they sit in silence and pray and prepare for the Head Master to come and bring them home.

Thousands and thousands raised their hands at them in crowded classrooms and called out Brother! Brother!

If you listen real closely you can hear the thousands now clapping their hands for job so well done.

What a wonderful name we gave these men: Brother! They certainly were, they still are and they always will be. They are our Brothers.

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Could not the same be said for our sisters and priests?