

Strong Footprints of Fr. Dunston



I recall and cherish my memories of Fr. Dunston which still give me strength and motivation to lead a meaningful religious life. The two years of my novitiate in the holy presence of this pious and saintly religious taught me how to do the least things with great love, commitment and devotion than yearning for doing greater things. During the last years of his life, his memory was at its low ebb; nevertheless, he never forgot what he valued much in his life, a life strongly founded on prayer. He was so particular that in his thought, word or deed he would neither hurt nor wound anyone but through his ever shining flames of love gain everyone for Christ. He could remember the name of Jesus always even when he could not recall the names of the members of his community, which clearly shows how he was closely associated with Jesus. He used to advise those who discontinued from the religious life to call the name of Jesus in all adversities of life without losing heart. This simple but powerful word has impacted my life and I still continue to use this for my meditation.

He faithfully followed the religious vows and ensured that at every moment he adhered by the laws of the vows intact. Though he often failed to recollect the names of the superiors, he knew very well the designation given to each and obeyed their instructions without raising an eyebrow even if they were hard to follow. To the authority he always expressed great reverence and respect that I could observe in his life. For the sake of fun, when the Novice Master stopped him from doing or eating something, he immediately obeyed like an innocent child and waited patiently to get his permission. The material possession he had was the least that any religious would have which consisted of an iron trunk box, three sets of habit and a crucifix. He practised absolute poverty in both spirit and matter without any compromise. He was totally chaste in his words and actions and considered it as an offence when someone casually made any comment with a sensual tinge in it.

He had no difficulty in asking forgiveness from the novices as well. When he objected to take medicine, the brothers used to insist; later, for this, he would ask pardon. There was an occasion when he stood before the door of the Novice Master to ask sorry for a trivial mistake he had committed. He was active in the community by being with the members in the playground, recreation hall and garden. His presence was always a boost for the novices.

The novices took turns to sleep in his room as his health was deteriorating but he would get out of the room stealthily and found his way to the chapel to be with God. Everyone enjoyed his presence and all relished the time they spent with him. I have seen him standing beneath the crucifix and pouring out his heart with patches of tears on his cheek recalling the sufferings and pains Jesus had to undergo during the time of crucifixion. He even was afraid of touching the crucifix remembering the excruciating pains and sufferings of Jesus and would say even our touch would escalate his pain. For fun sake, once I touched the wound of Christ forcefully and in no time he reacted with a hard slap.

Fr. Dunston was a man of spiritual wealth that he garnered by his intense prayer life and mediation. I recall the time I failed to take him back to his room from the chapel during the night hours as I slumbered myself due to exhaustion. Now I realize my fault of wasting the precious moments I got when I could grow more in my prayer life along with him. When the food was placed before him, he used to take the worst and give the best to others. Every minute that I spent with him gave me joyful memories especially the fun we used to have with him. These were the opportunities that taught me the true religious spirit and spirituality. I dream of a time leaving everything and living a life remembering Jesus and Jesus alone like Fr. Dunston.

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