

The Irish Independent's View: Brother Kevin had a heart big enough to carry troubles of so many and inspired Pope Francis.

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Editorial

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Brother Kevin Crowley left his beloved native Cork to take care of Dublin's poor.

Neither the splendours of Rome nor the domes of the Vatican troubled his thoughts as he humbly concentrated his energies on feeding the lines of hungry people that grew in the decades since he opened his soup kitchen on Dublin's Bow Street in 1969.

"I saw the people looking into dustbins and taking food out of the dustbins," he said in one of his last interviews. "As a follower of Saint Francis, I decided something should be done for them."

From a modest start preparing 50 meals a day, the centre was providing more than 800 by 2018.

He was always a gentle, meek man, but his perennial red cheeks would glow a shade deeper when he contemplated how the tide of need was rising instead of ebbing, despite the country becoming increasingly wealthy.

Capuchin Day Centre will be Brother Kevin's lasting legacy, but he would have preferred if there was no need for it

The movers and shakers at the top of the hierarchy did not figure greatly in his thoughts, but his legacy of devotion and care will live on in the minds of those shunted to the margins of our ever more busy world.

You are a child of God.

He would come to the attention of Pope Francis. When the pontiff visited Ireland in 2018, he made his way to the Capuchin Centre to meet the diminutive Leesider.

In Rome, Francis regaled a group of Italian Capuchins on how he had been inspired by the warmth, kindness and deep humanity he had witnessed on Bow Street.

He then quoted Brother Kevin's account of how the centre was open to all: "Here we do not ask where you come from, who you are. You are a child of God."

Everyone who met Brother Kevin was struck by his meekness; a small man lost within a giant brown habit. You came away wondering how a heart big enough to carry the troubles of so many could be contained in such a tiny frame.

On that day in Rome, Pope Francis also told his audience not to forget that "the devil enters from the pockets".

Brother Kevin and his fellow Capuchins devoted themselves to making sure that those who had no-thing in their pockets still had somewhere safe to go – a sanctuary where they would be treated with dignity.

Many now fear the church has become remote and distant. They saw the spires of churches shaken by scandals.

They also feel its future rests not in great cathedrals or gilded basilicas, but in the priceless selfless acts of compassion as exemplified by brother Kevin and his confreres.

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Pope Francis also warned of the risks of transforming pastors from servants to masters.

However, for Brother Kevin there was never any such risk – the only privilege he recognised was to be a servant of the poor.