

A Tribute to Kemi

Some anecdotes and moving personal testimonies of Kemi Adekoya, an assistant numerary who died unexpectedly on Sunday 19th, September, 2021

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“Young people can appear to be saints and older people very often do not...However, normally, the young ones haven’t yet achieved the holiness they seek; while the older ones, who have spent their lives in God’s service, and who humbly think they are not saints at all and never will be, but are

doing what they can to achieve it, these are the ones who lead holy lives.”

These words by Saint Josemaría Escrivá seem to come alive once more. Kemi, as she was usually called by her close friends and sisters, was full of life. Her death came to us as a shock because she was such a strong person. She was not ill, nor did she complain as we are wont to do when faced with a lot of work. Kemi went to bed full of life on Saturday and passed on to eternity in the early hours of Sunday morning. And once again, in her usual no-nonsense style. When you first encountered Kemi, you were always struck by her demeanour. From afar she could appear stern and unyielding. But as you got closer, her bigheartedness overwhelmed you. Sometimes, it was an effort for her to maintain that ‘serious’ look as

she corrected you, only to break out in her trademark toothy grin.

How do you describe the life of an unassuming woman? Kemi answered God's call on December 7, 1988. On that day, she committed to live her life as an assistant numerary in the Prelature of Opus Dei. That means that over the next 33 years, she would work actively in the service of her sisters and brothers, transforming her work into prayer and apostolate. And she did.

In her last years, she lived and worked in Lagoon Institute of Hospitality. Together with a team of students, she supervised lunch time in the cafeteria for the droves of schoolgirls and staff members of Lagoon School. She was always there with a ready smile. Ugonwa recounts how “on one occasion Kemi saw me on the queue, smiled at me, then turned to the student at the hot plate

telling her to serve me the choicest morsel.” For Chinyere, a teacher who has a daughter in the primary school, the experience was the same, “I used to think she was very strict and unyielding. One day I forgot to bring my daughter’s food flask from home. I was worried about what she would have for lunch. Then someone suggested I tell Aunty Kemi. I was reluctant to do so but summed up courage and told her. I will never forget her kindness...She told me not to worry and gave my daughter a hot meal and a drink. That day, I had a paradigm shift.”

Chika, another school mum, told her daughter about Aunty Kemi going to heaven. Her daughter exclaimed, “Oh mummy, I know her! Every lunch, she would come and sit and talk with us...we always looked forward to her coming”. At the Saturday bake sale, it was not uncommon to encounter Kemi at her

best. “Anyone who caught her eye received her attention” says Nkiru. “She smiled often and cracked good-humoured jokes while calling out to would-be patrons to buy homemade zobo (an infusion drink), chin-chin (fried pastry knobs), plantain chips and cakes. And if you were out of cash, she would jokingly call out ‘we have the solution’.”

On the table where the tribute book lies open, one reads several accounts about Kemi. These are written by people from varied backgrounds. What is most striking is the simplicity of these accounts. Daily events of ordinary life that will never be considered newsworthy. Yet, they reveal a heart that was in love with God and with others for His sake.

“Whenever Kemi would accompany me to the market for shopping, she would also bring some snacks along for us, the driver and the Alabaru

(porter) who would carry our heavy purchase to the van. She did this all the time. It was her way. She had such a big heart!” *Cecilia*

“I recall a vivid memory of you from last month. As I watched you from where I sat, mopping the entrance floor to the Institute, for some reason unknown to me, just watching you mop the floor that morning really struck me, and I even said an aspiration!” *Osose*

“Your dedication to work, service and empowering young girls is worthy of praise. In our early encounters I used to think that you were too serious, until I spent more time with you and experienced your warmth and cheerfulness. I will never forget the way you meticulously handled sacred linen, arranged things for the Mass and always had a joke or kind word for

anyone when we came around to talk with you”. *Catherine*

“One thing I know is very clear, you left at the right moment. Thinking about you in your last months, weeks and days, I have no doubt that you were perfectly prepared for this journey”. *Uche*

“I will miss seeing you after every day of recollection by the bake sale stand. I'll miss the short but rich conversations we had whenever I needed to buy books or sacramentals from the bookshop.” *Chinelo*

This video features Kemi from min. 2.44 till the end.

“A gem beyond measure, a light shining in the darkness...our conversations were always centred on that deep love for souls.” *Tessy*

“A heart open to the world.” *Lillian*

True to form, the words of Saint Josemaría have been fulfilled... *“the older ones, who have spent their lives in God’s service, and who humbly think they are not saints at all and never will be, but are doing what they can to achieve it, these are the ones who lead holy lives”*. In Kemi we have an example of what a fulfilled life in service of others looks like. The blessed perseverance that makes her life so ordinary yet so great. It is worthwhile to live and die in God’s service!

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