

On Life and Meaning

MARK PERES

Episode 15 – Kelly Chopus – Reformer Prophet

Missionary Zeal

And now a personal word,

When I listen to Kelly Chopus talk about being an instigator of change and the love of community that drives her work, I think about the stories of Edell Quinn and Nate Bartlett.

Edell Quinn was born in County Cook, Ireland in 1907. She felt a call to religious life at a young age. She wanted to join the Order of Saint Clare, a contemplative order of nuns in the Catholic Church, but she was turned down because she had advanced tuberculosis. After spending 18 months in a sanatorium, her condition unchanged, she decided to join the Legion of Mary, an association of lay Catholics who served the church. At the age of 20, she gave herself completely to helping the poor in the slums of Dublin.

In 1936, at the age of 29, and dying of tuberculosis, Quinn became a Legion of Mary Envoy to East and Central Africa. She devoted herself to her Catholic faith and to life as a missionary. Over the next 8 years, as tuberculosis ravaged her body, she shared her faith and opened missions and established hundreds of Legion of Mary branches and councils across the African continent.

Father McCarthy, later Bishop of Zanzibar, wrote of her, ‘Miss Quinn is an extraordinary individual: courageous, zealous and optimistic,’ having more experience than any single missionary he knew.

Edell Quinn died in 1944, buried in Nairobi, Kenya, the community that became her home. In 1994, Pope John Paul II declared her venerable, a recognition of her dedication to the Catholic faith.

Nate Bartlett is a twenty-something member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints also commonly known as LDS or the Mormon Church. All LDS young men are expected to serve a two-year, full-time mission proselytizing the faith. Mormon women may serve too but do so solely as a personal decision. Missionaries do not choose where they serve or the language in which they will evangelize.

In 2013 Nate Bartlett was sent to Thailand. He served for two years going door to door sharing the Mormon faith. He wore the trademark missionary black pants, white short-sleeve shirt, and thin black tie. He learned to speak Thai fluently. And he gained great affection for Thai people.

When he returned to Salt Lake City, Nate made a decision. Instead of going to college, he went back to Thailand. He started a Youtube channel and began producing videos that he describes as mischievous and wholesome. The videos set up light-hearted pranks. He makes fun of tourists and draws attention to cultural differences and what we have in common. His biggest fans are Thai people who see the videos as clever and playful.

When I think of Kelly Chopus, I think of one-part Edell Quinn, devoted and fearless in new places, and one-part Nate Bartlett, mischievous and fun-loving. Kelly makes and breaks rules. She has a leader's mind and a missionary heart, seeing connections and bringing people together to change and save the world.

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