



**Tribute by Grenada's Prime Minister  
Dr. the Right Honourable Keith Mitchell  
Funeral of the late Sir James Mitchell  
Former Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines  
December 18, 2021**

Today, it's an honour to stand before you to pay tribute to a man who was a friend and mentor, but more so, he was a genuine Caribbean patriot.

Although the people of Bequia and the wider community of St Vincent and the Grenadines can lay claim to him as one of their own, we, the Caribbean people can also jealously proclaim him as one of ours – an upstanding Caribbean national, greatly revered for his political acumen, his love for country, his humility in service to people and his commitment to regionalism.

I can't help but smile a little despite the sadness of the moment. Because he was right. Years ago when he travelled to Grenada to pay tribute to our former Prime Minister, the late Sir Eric Matthew Gairy, he told me then – Keith you have to speak at my funeral. I asked him how could he be sure that he would go first and he said to me - that's the natural order of things, he is older.

So yes he was right, and here I am today, fulfilling my duty for it was not a question. And even if it was, how could I say no! Sir James expressed his desire and I am guided accordingly.

In fact, he said so to his daughter Louise who also relayed his wishes. When Sister Mia visited him at the hospital in Barbados, he told her to remind me that I have to speak at his funeral; so she called me immediately after. Therefore, as a true friend and an appreciative mentee, I'm here to fulfill that wish. I hope these heartfelt words do justice to this very special individual.

I am also here today to honour his family, and to say thanks to each and every one of you for sharing him with us. I am well aware that for all the benefit St. Vincent and the region gained through his service, this equated to a corresponding sacrifice for family life.

To Sabrina, Gretel, Gabija and Louise, you can be comforted knowing that Daddy did his best – and he did his family proud, he lived a full life and in the words of Frank Sinatra, he did it his way.

To the wider nation, Sir James is a quintessential Vincentian son, in whom you should forever be well-pleased.

From humble beginnings in Bequia, Sir James maintained humility throughout his life and turned out to be a Caribbean leader of the highest repute.

Humility and love for people are essential attributes of any successful politician or service-oriented person. And any display of arrogance is likely to undermine whatever goodwill is created among supporters. Sir James was the epitome of a good politician.

He was not only well-respected at home, he also played a significant role in political and other developments elsewhere in the Caribbean. I recall him doing a tribute at the funeral of the late Errol Barrow, the first Prime Minister of Barbados. I was then a student at UWI, Cave Hill.

We will always remember the role he played in assisting Guyana's then President Hugh Desmond Hoyte to address concerns there over free and fair elections. His role in ensuring that genuine democratic principles were returned to Guyana should never be under-estimated.

Sir James brought President Hoyte, along with Prime Ministers John Compton and Eugenia Charles to Mustique for that famous summit that in the end saved Guyana from the brink, and ensured a new era of free and fair elections in our South American neighbour.

The life of Sir James is littered with many examples of him being his brother's keeper. St. Vincent, he was your son but for us in Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique, he was like a Godfather, who throughout his career as a politician and even after his retirement, provided advice and counsel through crucial periods of our history, particularly in the last 40 years.

I personally owe him an eternal debt that could never possibly be repaid. I credit Sir James with being a central figure in guiding my emergence as a leader.

He was consistently available and always willing to provide advice and encouragement - in the good times, and particularly and more importantly, in the bad times. He was certainly not a fair-weather friend.

I remember when I lost the Grenada general elections in 2008, Sir James was the one who was there to comfort me and he even invited me and my family to Bequia. I accepted his invitation and spent a few days in Bequia with him.

But our acquaintance began long before that. I first met Sir James back in 1972 while in St Vincent as the captain of the Grenada cricket team. He was also the Premier at that time and I remember him saying to me, 'you are the captain of the Grenada cricket team, I am the captain of the St. Vincent political team'. Little did we know then, that we will be forever linked as politicians and leaders of our respective countries.

Our relationship was rekindled and bolstered after 1984 when I returned home to participate in local politics.

Sir James and his cousin, the then Prime Minister of St Lucia, Sir John Compton always made themselves available to support and to provide mentorship to me, a young politician at the time. And I am eternally grateful for this, particularly his longstanding example of humility and service to people.

He was a central figure in providing advice and guidance to many other Grenadian politicians in the post invasion era of 1983. His constructive role in ensuring that the Grenadian society was held together and revived, will always be remembered by every patriotic Grenadian.

Sir James was a peace-loving man. Fiery in his defence of his people and his promotion of inclusive development but a firm proponent of peace and stability and togetherness. He was a stalwart of the regional integration movement and a champion for peace and social justice.

He was a central figure in bringing together the leaders of differing political forces in Grenada's post 1983 period, and providing guidance that helped us come together in the interest of the country. In fact, he played host to a pivotal meeting on Union Island that gave birth to the New National Party, which still remains the dominant party in Grenada.

In 1989 when our Police Commissioner was shot, Sir James was also there for his Grenadians brothers and sisters, providing comfort as we dealt with the traumatic situation.

In that same year when I challenged the then Prime Minister Herbert Blaize and won the leadership of the NNP, Sir James joined Prime Ministers Eugenia Charles – Dominica, Sir Kennedy Simmons – St Kitts and Nevis and Sir John Compton of St Lucia to meet with us after Mr. Blaize refused to recognise the results.

When the initial meeting yielded no results, Sir James returned later, at the bidding of the other leaders, for a further meeting with Mr. Blaize – a one on one session – which it was hoped would help resolve the impasse.

That meeting, as I recall, lasted about one and a half hours but made no headway. Mr. Blaize's stubbornness persisted and at the end, when Sir James asked him what he should report to the other leaders, Mr Blaize said "tell them you came and I listened".

Years later, in 1995, when I became Prime Minister, Sir James was the first to reach out – and his advice and guidance were pivotal especially in those early days. And throughout my career, he always made himself available to give advice.

Reflecting on this longstanding friendship, I can say in all honesty that Sir James is the one regional politician that I have had the closest relationship with. Our enduring friendship was also mutually beneficial to Grenada and St. Vincent, as we consistently forged united positions at various fora in promoting our joint interests and the interests of the sub-region.

In fact, as an example of that close relationship, Sir James signed on behalf of Grenada at the meeting where GEEST Line, the British company, was taking over the interests of the various banana societies in the Windward Islands. He was there representing St Vincent and the Grenadines, but on our request, also acted on Grenada's behalf.

It may seem that he was always coming to my assistance and providing guidance but there were occasions when we were merely counterparts – attending meetings together – both as government and political leaders – throughout the region and further afield. There was never daylight between us. The *firm* of Mitchell and Mitchell was always in full effect. I truly admired and respected him for his sage guidance.

Sir James was a founding member of the Caribbean Democratic Union – CDU – the organisation of Caribbean democratic parties. He was initially its chairman and a leader for the promotion of democracy in the region.

Sir James made appearances during every political campaign of the New National Party since I became leader, inserting both his wit and wisdom, and accentuating our efforts with an infusion of encouragement and confidence.

I mentioned earlier that he was there for the state funeral of the late Sir Eric Gairy in 1997. I recall that in his tribute, Sir James revealed that Sir Eric told him he envisioned me as the natural inheritor of his base. That revelation had a profound impact on me personally and I'm grateful that he shared it, albeit publicly.

My friends, I have personally learned a lot from Sir James, including the endearing value of friendship, and the redeeming nature of political tolerance, something I believe is sadly lacking among many politicians today. We can be political opponents, but when it comes to matters of national interest, we must be able to put those differences aside and do what's best for the country and our people.

Sir James had many epic political battles at home against Brother Ralph Gonsalves – but I never ever sensed that he had any bitterness towards him. He highly regarded the skill and acumen of Prime Minister Gonsalves – and was always mindful that he would have to work extra hard to defeat him.

His legacy is one of country above politics. Indeed we all will do well to honour him by the way we show respect to our opponents; and to understand that political battles are not among enemies, but among patriots who are determined to promote their own vision for the development of their people. His own vision for St Vincent and the Grenadines has stood the test of time.

Sisters and brothers, friends, lying here before us is one of your greatest, in fact our greatest - a Caribbean hero, a legend, a stalwart, an exemplary leader worthy of emulation. We who had the opportunity to walk with him, had the privilege to watch a transformative leader in action. His legacy will not only inspire us today – but generations of Caribbean citizens to come.

The bible says in Romans 14, verse 7 – “For none of us lives for ourselves alone and none of us dies for ourselves alone.”

Sir James embodied that – and as a modern day architect of Vincentian and indeed Caribbean civilization – we shall be forever grateful for his unmatched service in the vineyard.

I regret not having that final visit with him but from our many conversations over the years, and in my final chat with him, I know he was well aware of my immense gratitude for his guidance and his friendship over the decades.

‘Walk good’ my friend. There’s a special place in my heart for you. In fact, you will be forever entrenched in the hearts of Vincentians and many other Caribbean nationals. Your contribution at the local and regional level is immeasurable and at the same time, invaluable. You lived a full and meaningful life and you led by example. We shall always lift you up! I pray that your soul rests in perfect peace.

In closing, on behalf of the Government and people of Grenada and on my own behalf, I extend deepest condolences to the family of Sir James. We know your pain but we encourage you to be comforted by the tremendous contribution he made, not only to St. Vincent and the Grenadines but to the entire Caribbean.

I thank you.