

**HOMILY FOR FUNERAL OF CHARLES BERGEDICK, S.M.
SEPTEMBER 27, 2008**

“I give praise to you, Father...for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike”....(Matthew 11)

Judy and Nancy, relatives and friends of Fr. Charlie Bergedick

Parishioners of Emannuel Parish.....

Fellow Marianists.....

Perhaps you realized in my eulogy at the beginning that Fr.

Charlie encountered at least two extremely challenging and significant upheavals/transitions in his life as a Marianist....

The first one came only a few years after his ordination and return to the United States in 1959 at the age of 31.....

It was called the Second Vatican Council.....

That historic council in so many ways transformed the

Church and the role of the priest for which Fr. Charles had prepared himself.....

In many ways, in a very few short years the Church and the role of the priest were radically different than his seminary training had anticipated.....

And then from January 1965 to January 1974, Fr. Charlie served as a missionary in Africa...

Anyone who lived through those years as an adult in the United States knows that the country to which he returned in January of 1974 at the age of 46 was radically different than it had been in January 1965....

We get a glimpse of that when Fr. Charlie writes in his autobiography “things had really changed since I last taught at Chaminade High School.....the student body had become coed and, of course, there were laymen and laywomen teachers even in the religion department.”

He goes on... “At first it was a bit rough but then I adapted to the situation and learned to enjoy it very much”

Fr. Charlie had a childlike quality, I believe that helped him to adapt both to Vatican II and a cultural revolution that in many ways he bypassed when he was in Africa during the latter part of the 60s and early 70s

That childlike quality referred to in our gospel reading...

“You have revealed these things to the childlike....”

To me, Fr. Charlie had a beautiful childlike simplicity.....

How else can you understand the way he made a decision to join the Marianists....a decision he describes in his autobiography in this way:

“One night when I was walking home from a dance in the spring of 1945 I said to myself, “That’s enough messing around. What are you going to do with your life. And the thought came to my mind, ‘What does it profit a person to gain the whole world and lose his own soul? It profits nothing.’ So I decided that the best way to do that would be to join the Brothers of Mary and with them help people get to heaven.”

Now, admittedly, 1945 was a much simpler time. But that was a very simple discernment process wasn’t it???

Nothing complicated or agonizing about that... .

And anyone who knows Fr. Charlie, knows that he never looked back.....

Besides the beautiful simplicity of a child, I believe that he

had the resilience, the adaptability of a child.....

He had a grasp of the essentials and was able to adapt to the non-essentials.....

Whether it was 1945, 1975, or 1995.....

Whether it was high school teaching or parish ministry....

Whether it was the Midwest, Fribourg, Switzerland, Rockaway,

N.Y. on Long Island, Asaba or Nkhata Bay in Africa.....

I thought I knew Fr. Charlie fairly well since I lived with him

more than ten years but I was surprised to find several

poems among his few belongings when he died....

I did not know that he collected poems.....

There were several copies of one poem which I believe

typifies his life so well.....

It's entitled:

A Clown's Prayer

Lord, as I stumble through this life,
Help me to create more laughter than tears,
Dispense more happiness than gloom,
Spread more cheer than despair.
Never let me be indifferent that I will not
See the wonder in the eyes of a child,
Or the tremble in the eye of the aged.

Never let me forget that my total effort is
To cheer people, make them happy and forget
At least for a moment all the unpleasant
Things in their lives.

And Lord, in my final moment, may I hear
“when you made my people smile,
you made me smile.”

That is Fr. charlie, isn't it?

He was so optimistic....and more than that....

he was hope-filled....a childlike quality also....

Hope enabled him to create more laughter than tears.

Spread more cheer than despair.

And see the wonder in the eyes of a child.

When I lived with Fr. Charlie on his 70th birthday I think he
gave everyone in the community a little card with a rainbow.

In the background and on the card it said:

ask God
trust God
expect his blessings

That expressed so well Fr. Charlie's personal
warmth, as well as his hopeful spirit.

And his hope had a solid foundation

Which we read about in the first reading....

I will call this to mind, as my reason to have hope:
the favors of the Lord are not exhausted,
His mercies are not spent;
They are renewed each morning,
So great is his faithfulness.....(lamentations)

That also was so Fr. Charlie....

And we read in the second reading – “Hope does not disappoint,
because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts
Through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us”(Romans)

We will miss him and his smile!!!!

Is there anything we need today more than hopeful people...

Like Fr. Charlie????

That is our challenge.....

That is the challenge Fr. Charlie leaves with us....

To be hopeful people.....

It is his legacy, if you will....

As we continue this eucharist, let us pray

That we also may be hope-filled....

And that we may remember every morning that the favors of

The lord are renewed each morning and

That hope does not disappoint because the love of god has

Been poured out into our hearts through the holy spirit.....

And, if we listen closely, we may even hear.....

“when you made my people smile, fr. Charlie,

You made me smile.”