

Homily for Bro. Charles Boglitz, SM (RIP)
Cupertino, Ca. October 16, 2008
By Fr. Tim Kenney, SM

I am very honored to be able to be here tonight to celebrate this Mass of Resurrection as we remember our friend and our brother in religious life: Bro. Charles Boglitz.

Tonight we come here as a community of faith: a faith that transforms us, a faith that reveals God's story in us and transforms our story into God's.

Tonight we come to celebrate Charlie's life. We all have many memories of Charlie: good ones and perhaps in recent times not so good one's as Charlie's health was going downhill and he became difficult to live with here in Cupertino.

I think all of us can say, Charlie was a man of prayer and a person who loved the Society of Mary very much. I bet Charlie must be delighted that he died on the feast of Our Lady of the Pillar and on the day we call Marianist World Day of Prayer.

I have known Charlie since the summer of 1966 when I was preparing to enter Junipero Serra High School and I had to take an English class before becoming a Freshmen and I had Charlie, and I must admit, like others, I was terrified of him. He was strict. Charlie had a stare and look that could cause students to cringe and pee in their pants. But through time I was able to see beyond the gruff and tougher than nails man known by the students as Mr. Bogo and Bogie, and I saw a person with a great smile and a man who was very proud of his vocation as a Marianist and as a teacher; a man of wisdom who seemed to have answers for everything and wanted to steer me in the direction of becoming a Marianist.

That is why I chose the first reading from the book of Wisdom. The passage speaks about the wise man having great faith in God and striving to pass that wisdom down to others. That is what Charlie did for so many of us at Serra High School. He became a wisdom figure and a person who wanted to pass on his faith and love for God and Mary.

Charlie was one of six children: 4 boys and 2 girls and he often commented that he out lived them all. He grew up living in a poor area and in a

poor family but even then, Charlie was a tough cookie, weathering through storms. When he was 2 years old, he, like so many children during his time was struck with the influenza epidemic, which killed many children. But Charlie survived. He saw his mom die at the age of 12 and his father die when he was 22.

Many of you may not know that Charlie had an interesting vocation story. When he made a decision to become a Brother in the 7th grade while in Pittsburgh, he had never been taught by a Brother nor seen one, but he knew he wanted to be a teacher. He became involved in his parish and he got close to many of the School Sisters of Notre Dame nuns in his grade school, staying after school and helping them out, working in the sacristy on weekends as well as in the summers. He had a great devotion to Our Lady and the sisters saw this fervor in him. One of them, Sr. Florita told him that her brother was a Marianist priest and was the Provincial of the St. Louis Province. She said she wanted to introduce him to Charlie and so that was arranged and it was a great meeting. I remember Charlie saying that he visited the Brothers in a nearby parish while in the 8th grade. A man dressed in a Prince Albert coat answered the doorbell and Charlie thought he was the butler. Charlie said, I told him I wanted to speak to one of the Brothers and he told me he was Brother Aloysius, the Superior. That was Ascension Thursday and two months later Aloysius and Charlie were taking the bus to Mt. St. John in Dayton on July 31, 1931. Just before leaving, one of Charlie's neighborhood friends asked him, "what if you do not like the place?" and Charlie replied in his determined way, "I'll have to make the best of it since I don't plan on returning."

The grace of God and our Lady went with Charlie from that moment on and he lived 74 years of religious life, taking him to many places after Dayton: Baltimore, Brooklyn, San Francisco, Alameda, Honolulu, Los Angeles, Gardena and Cupertino, working in an orphanage, working in schools on the elementary and high school levels; assisting with archives, and of course writing histories. Among his writings, he wrote the history of the former Pacific Province; he wrote a history of the Marianists in Korea; he wrote a history of Junipero Serra High School; and he wrote his own autobiography. Each of these is a classic if you ever had the privilege of reading any of them. Each of them is of course slanted a bit by Charlie's understanding.

I chose the second reading because it reflects the life of St. Paul. St. Paul as you know was a very strong willed person: a man who could be very frank, determined, and forthright. St. Paul had his own vision of how things should be for the church after his conversion and ran into numerous differences of opinion

with people, including Peter. St. Paul acknowledged his weakness but also his strength from God.

As you know, Charlie could be outspoken. Many characterized him as putting that phrase from the first reading, “the fear of the Lord” in you. He had a good heart but he also would speak his mind.

One time he said, Timothy, I don’t know if I ever told you this story about when I was in my first year of teaching. One day the Director happened to see me using a yardstick on one of the boys. Later he called me and said, “I want you to write to Fr. Tetslaff and tell him you are using corporal punishment.” You know what I told that old buzzard. I replied that it was his responsibility to inform the provincial, not mine. However, I added, if you do write, be sure and tell him that the other Brothers are also using corporal punishment. For if he writes to me, I will tell him that I am merely following what others are doing.” Needless to say, Bro. Joe never wrote. Pretty gutsy for a young brother in his first year out teaching.

I was trying to think of two things that Charlie would be most grateful for if he had to express that to us tonight.

1. The first thing Charlie would always speak proudly of was that he was a teacher in the classroom for 51 years, thirty three of which were at Serra High School in Gardena. A teacher par excellence! These were the greatest years of his life. He loved working with young people, giving them a good foundation and instilling in them values. Latin, English, speech, French and religion were his forte. He would often comment to me and to others: I loved every minute of it, and with his finger he would say “and so will you.” He told me in many ways with great conviction – Timothy, your going to be a teacher and a Marianist, and if everyone leaves the Society, there will be two people left: you and me. Charlie was very enthusiastic when it came to working in schools: not only in the classroom but in moderating many different clubs and working as a librarian. He was voted several times by the students at Serra as one of their best teachers. Charlie was a strong believer in Catholic Marianist education. He was convinced of its value for young people: it was the way for the poor to rise out of poverty; it was the way for society to have faithfilled citizens; it was the means of strengthening the Church by forming students according to the gospel message; it was the way to invite young people into religious life.

2. The second thing that Charlie was most proud of was his recruitment efforts to religious life. In 1985 Charlie wrote to me the following: “I am particularly grateful to the Lord for enabling me over the years to recruit a few workers for His vineyard. Two of my first students in the fourth grade at St. James, Baltimore are now priests: a Redemptorist and a Trappist” In another letter He wrote: “My greatest consolation is the number of Marianists (8), diocesan priests (5), and religious priests (a Jesuit, a Redemptorist and a Trappist) that I have taught.” Talk about God working through someone to touch the lives of others. I received many many letters from Charlie, but one that he wrote me back on Jan. 7, 1996 when he thought he was dying and he wanted to let me know he would see me in heaven, he wrote: “With my days coming to an end, I am so grateful and happy that the continuation of my work in the Society of Mary will be carried on for many more years by you and your splendid work and by others whom I have had a share in recruiting: in particular Fr. Mifsud, Fr. Russi, Bro. Haster, and Fr. Malley, all of whom have done so well.”

I can't tell you how many times Charlie spoke to me over the years about the importance of recruitment; attracting young people to our Society; and extending the invitation. And that he did. We are so grateful to you Charlie for those years as a teacher, for those many invitations that you gave to young men to work in God's vineyard as a priest or religious. Just as you were proud of those things in your life, so too are we tonight proud of you for what you were able to do.

I could go on and on with stories about Charlie as I know each of you could in your own way. I was always personally encouraged by my many conversations with Charlie. I was always amazed by his memory and knowing the personnel inside out. I was always intrigued by his network of friends: he always had a way of knowing and getting information on what was happening world wide in the Marianist family and in the Church.

Because of my great love for our Society, I am truly grateful to Charlie for his encouragement to me to have the courage to join and I will never forget him.

We have lost another one of our “characters” in the Society of Mary. We have before us an example of a man who was able to persevere through victories and defeats, success and failure, sin and grace, in his strength and in his weakness, standing at the cross with Mary.

As we continue this celebration of faith, may each of us be inspired by the good that we remember from Charlie. May Charlie be one of those faithful servants for whom “life is changed, not ended” and live with God and our Marianist saints forever.