

HOMILETIC EULOGY for BROTHER WILLIAM McCALL, SM

Spring comes late in the High Sierras. It has a kind of late vocation, and seems to be quieter than the coyote'd springtimes elsewhere in the Coast Range. The blossoms! Yellow abounds, the Mountain Mustard; also slim red Indian Paintbrush, and indigo Lupine. We were hiking – 1970, the Paiute Pass; and the wildflowers were abloom. Brother Bill was the caboose, officially to keep an eye on all the hiking lads in his High Sierra Troop, but also because he was now a little older, a little slower. Come nighttime, after a day's hiking, with the youngsters bagged down in their tube tents ready for the night time rain, we who were on his team gathered up the slope. Gazing up at the stars that were about to fall on the Alabama Range, Bill looked over to me and said, "Say, Chief, don't you think this is as close to heaven as we'll ever get in this life." I said, "Yes; it's 9,000 feet." He paused; then added: "Well, I *will* say, I feel sometimes very close to the Lord when we are just saying daily prayers in the community chapel." A sentimental line from one who rarely spoke in that manner, or at all.

Ask John Lafferty, one of his star debaters from his second stint as Speech Coach at Riordan in the late '60s. For, when John scored exceptionally high in national ratings as a debater, Bill said, "You seem surprised." John said, "I am." Bill said, "You're *good*. You're *real* good." And said it with a distant smile. Bill knew he was making a great difference in John's life. Just a few years ago, when John heard that Brother Bill didn't always look back and think his ministry had been that successful, John came out to California to tell Bill just how much he loved him and was grateful to him for skills he learned, and much more during what was a crucial time in the young man's life.

John was not the only one. We young Brothers looked up to and learned from Bill. If we needed advice or help, Bill would sense it. As to community life, he was something of a philosopher. "Chief," he once told me, "You know, communities reflect their director. If the director is a man of detail, the community tends to be that way too. If he's a 'hail fellow well met,' there are more get-togethers, there's time to rehash every play after a basketball game, and you do things together on free days. It's better." But as director, he was both.

Bill has certainly been one of the most important Marianists in our sixty some years of corporate presence in Southern California. His contribution has quietly given shape to our professionalism, our reputation with the families and the Archdiocese, the profound respect and affection of our alumni, above all, our

own at-homeness in religious community. Yet he did this quietly. Chief was a literate man of few words, who taught Speech; a well-read man who could converse on many topics, but preferred to listen, then just reflect here and there. He held many offices of leadership, including chief administrator of Chaminade, President of its Board, religious superior, and in his later years, coordinator of alumni. He spent time in Province ministry, too, in development work, even in parish life at Queen of Apostles. He had a short stint in Honolulu, but is best known for his outstanding English and Speech teaching at our schools of San Francisco and the Los Angeles San Fernando Valley – Riordan and Chaminade. On his watch as president, Chaminade Preparatory acquired its Chatsworth campus. Less remembered, perhaps, is that when he was the senior English teacher, Chaminade annually had the largest number of merit scholarship finalists of any Catholic high school in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.

Above all, Bill was an older Brother. He deeply loved the Church, had devotion to Mary; and was solidly dedicated to his vocation. Our passage from the sixth chapter of John's Gospel is apt. The Lord has called Bill to himself. All part of a plan, one that Bill believed in. Like the flowers in the Paiute Pass, this eternal blooming for Bill is a late spring – as his last illness became long and painful. But oh the glory of this later spring, because what has been so deeply rooted – Bill's goodness, fidelity to his calling, care and concern for his Brothers, and his love for his students, are the varied colors of the blossoms of that field which was his life.

Once he said to me, pointing over to a boy who was doing mountain-climbing exercises, who upon graduation went to the Air Force Academy, "Isn't he the kind of young man you'd love to have as a son?" I said, "Yes, Brother."

There are many vocations in the Church. What drew me to the Society of Mary was the daily goodness, service, practical humility, realistic ideals, of men like Bill, "Assistant Prefect of Boarders," in 1957, Student Brother in temporary vows in the Community of Chaminade at its original campus in West LA. Years later I was deeply touched when he thanked me profusely for helping him and his family through his sister Dorothy's last illness. For a few persons here present, yes, Bill was a true and at one time in their lives, greatly needed, positive father figure. To the majority of our Congregation tonight, certainly a respectable confrère. And from those of us, privileged to have known and worked with him over many years, one last, final, "Hail to the Chief."

- *Laus Deo.*