

Father Raymond Middendorf, S.M.

Mass of the Resurrection

April 11, 2008

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CEO of the Office of Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Miami-Dade

Most Reverend Archbishop, Father Murnane, Father Doyle, Esteemed Clergy, Members of the Society of Mary; Brothers Kevin and George, My Brothers and Sisters of Nativity Parish, and representatives from Mission Noel in Puerto Rico.

I know that there are many troubled hearts here today. Mine is one of them. I grieve with all of you who knew and loved Father Ray. Our hearts are troubled. But Father Ray's is not. He understood the meaning of today's Gospel reading. He strived to live his life every day in the knowledge that the Lord Jesus Christ was the resurrection and the life. He believed in Jesus Christ and knew that in the story of life, death is not an ending for those who believe.

From the time he professed first vows in 1946 in the Society of Mary and until his death he incorporated the Virgin Mary into his life and ministry and made her known to the world. Serving as a priest for over 40 years in Puerto Rico, Father Ray became affectionately known as the cruise ship chaplain. This stemmed from his love of cruises and his habit of meeting cruise ships when they docked at the Puerto Rican port to minister to passengers.

Father Ray came to Nativity four years ago and became the unofficial Nativity photographer. He could be seen at liturgical and social celebrations snapping pictures of individuals, couples and families. He memorialized the life of our parish in pictures. And these pictures told the story of our community. It was not uncommon for parishioners to receive in the mail a note from Father Ray with the picture he had taken of them.

Ironically as Father Ray was snapping these pictures you began to realize that he was the picture. He was the picture of humility. He showed us how to live our lives with joy and peace. His humility was honed by over sixty years of service to God and nurtured by his devotion to the Blessed Mother.

Mary, "the humble handmaid," prepared him throughout his life to receive the Holy Spirit by teaching him to be lowly, humble and docile.

The children on Nativity loved Father Ray and Father Ray loved them. The mutual attraction was borne out of Father Ray's childlike heart, which he never failed to share with whomever he met.

I always thought of Father Ray as a gentle man. And the beauty of his life was his desire to be Christ for another – to lift up another and to help bear their burden. He did it for me. And I know that he did it for so many others here today.

Yes, Father Ray new the way. The truth. And the life.

During his time here at Nativity he poured himself out freely to us. He taught us the story of salvation; to be gentle and humble in heart. That, in a nutshell, was Father Ray's theology. His life was a testament to it. And he left us a reminder of how God works in our lives – and how we are to live our lives.

He remained faithful to the Blessed Mother till the end. As the Chaminade Community of Faith prayed the rosary over him in his hospice bed, he lifted his hands in prayer and took his last breath.

Father Ray, you have fought the good fight to the end; you have run the race to the finish; you have kept the faith; rest now in the hands of the Lord and know that you shall be missed by all whose lives you so enriched.