

MASS OF CHRISTIAN BURIAL

JOHN C. RIELLY, SM

September 20, 2008

In a few minutes, I will proclaim those great words of faith found in the preface for this mass of Christian Burial:

For your faithful, Lord, life is changed, not ended!

We are celebrating a great journey – the greatest of all journeys - a transition from this life to eternal life.

Last Sunday, on the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, our brother and friend, Father John Rielly, after sharing in the mystery of Christ's passion shared in his death – with profound hope of sharing in his resurrection.

Today we are gathered to thank God for giving him life and faith and to pray confidently for his entrance into eternal life.

Father Jack had asked me to give the homily at the mass of Christian Burial, but did not select the readings from Sacred Scripture.

So many passages from Sacred Scripture we heard in recent days reminded me of his life – and of eternal life.

It was only after considerable prayer and reflection that I finally selected the readings that have just been proclaimed.

For me they underline three wonderful traits of a follower of Christ:

joy in family and extended family,
confidence in the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary
and finally, appreciation of the Eucharist.

I believe each of the readings speaks to us about the fascinating journey Father John Rielly has made for nearly 84 years.

Recently, as Jack and I were speaking about birthdays he took mischievous delight in saying "12-12-24" and I finally realized he was reminding me that his birthday coincided with the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

That explains why he asked that the memorial card feature this inspiring image of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

His life was markedly Marian.

Among the many readings about Mary that we have in the lectionary, I chose the familiar gospel of the marriage feast of Cana because it reflects so many features of Father Jack's journey of faith.

Let's begin with the last words of the Gospel:

*Jesus did this at the beginning of his signs at Cana in Galilee
and so revealed his glory,
and his disciples began to believe in him.*

Father Jack's journey of faith – of believing in Jesus -
began in San Francisco nearly 84 years ago,
one of seven children of Thomas and Mary Ellen Rielly.

Two of his brothers, Thomas and Francis, became diocesan priests
and served here in the Santa Clara Valley; they have gone before us.

With us today are his sisters Mary, Patricia, and Rose and his brother Bill
along with so many other members of the Rielly family
in which Jack found such great joy and strength.

In the name of our Marianist community we offer our deepest sympathy
and heartfelt thanks for your support of Jack
in his journey from San Francisco in 1924 to Cupertino in 2008
with many, many stops along the way!

I also want to acknowledge the presence of many
from Sister Patricia's San Jose Dominican community.

Jack entered the Society of Mary a year ahead of me.

After that he and I were companions on the journey for more than sixty years.
We actually journeyed together to and from Fribourg, Switzerland
where we lived for five years at the Marianist International Seminary
and studied at the University of Fribourg.

After our ordination in 1953 and completing our studies
we began a new phase of ministry in the Society of Mary.

We also journeyed together in recent years – literally –
when I was his designated driver to visits around the Bay Area.

The evening after Father Jack's death our Marianist community in Cupertino
gathered to share memories of Father Jack's life.

One of the first comments was about his first trip across country many years ago
with Brother Joseph Becker,
who later told us that he was amazed that Jack said hardly a word on that journey.
No one else ever had that experience with Jack! He was never at a loss for words!

Earlier this month Brother Jack Ventura came from our provincial office in Saint Louis
to give a special tribute to Father Jack for his devoted service to our lay Marianists
on the West Coast and Hawaii.

Although he was dying, Jack was looking forward to this event and in response to Brother Jack's words he spoke slowly and with difficulty, but with a clear message about what it means to be family – family with us in Cupertino, family with the lively Rielly family family with our Marianist associates who found life and strength thanks to Father Jack's faithful service as their spiritual director, family with the Knights of Columbus in Northern California – a service he undertook in recent years and continued as long as he possibly could, even when he needed a driver to take him to meetings and gatherings.

Father Jack loved to be with people – whether with us in Cupertino – or with his family and extended family reflecting the first words of the Gospel: *There was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the wedding.*

One of my principal reasons for choosing this Gospel, however, is found in those inspiring words that describe Father Jack's journey so well: *His mother said to the servers, "Do whatever he tells you."* As Marianists we find life in these words. The response, of course, is a wholehearted willingness to do whatever we believe Jesus tells us to do.

Our program notes the many different missions that were given to Father Jack over his long life ... teacher and pastor, hospital chaplain and school chaplain, service to students and alumni, vocation ministry for the Province and for the Diocese, guide for those beginning their journey as Marianist novices, Faithful Friar for the Knights of Columbus, but above all, simply being a companion with others on the journey.

In our community remembrance, several mentioned that "enthusiasm" was the key word describing Jack's life and work. He accepted each and every assignment with a cheerful "Yes!" Many knew him as "Smiling Jack!"

For me, personally, his interest, encouragement and prayerful support have been priceless gifts. Even when we were separated by mountains and oceans, we were united in the Eucharist which transcends time and space.

His journey was marked by cheerful persistence.
Some might call this stubbornness, but I always saw it as tenacity –
holding fast to his convictions, even when they were not shared by others.

The passage from Paul's letter to the Romans speaks eloquently:

What will separate us from the love of Christ?

*...I am convinced that nothing will be able to separate us
from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Father Jack liked to use little phrases as key words in his homilies
– and one that he used often in these latter years was “Cope with Hope!”
That reflects the slogan that Father Jim Mifsud promoted here: “Never give up!”

Over the past two years Jack received the sacrament of the sick several times.
I anointed Father Jack three times, each time just before he was taken to the hospital.
Each time I prayed for healing, but above all, for peace, for I really expected him to die.
The first time he was out - in another world - for several days.
During that time a notice went out far and wide from our office in St. Louis
that Father Jack was seriously ill with a liver problem.
But the typist misspelled liver, so the Marianist world
was alerted to pray for this man in Cupertino who had a lover problem!
Later when I was able to tell Jack about this, he enjoyed the story –
and more importantly, never denied it!

As long as he possibly could, Father Jack celebrated Mass every day.
Even when he was weakened by illness,
he would still respond to requests to celebrate a parish mass
– and particularly looked forward to celebrating mass here at Queen of Apostles.
He even asked me to take him to Saint Joseph of Cupertino
to celebrate weekday Masses there.
It was always a great experience to see how he found life in the Eucharist.

But his first duty was to us and he was most faithful
not only in celebrating Mass but also in visiting the sick and hearing confessions.
At our chapel in Cupertino as long as he could he concelebrated daily
and took great pride in proclaiming the Gospel clearly and forcefully.
That's the reason I included the short passage
from Paul's letter to the Corinthians about the Eucharist.

One of the greatest gifts we Marianists have received
is a devotion to Mary that clearly leads us to Jesus.
Our Founder, Blessed William Joseph Chaminade,
insisted on this Christ-centered spirituality
that we find so life-giving for ourselves and for all those we serve.
That was certainly exemplified in Father Jack's life.
May he rest in peace ...

Stephen Tutas, SM