

**Homily for the Mass of Christian Burial for Father Thomas Schoen. Tuesday, April 27, 2010 at**

**Queen of Apostles Chapel. Scripture: Wisdom 3:1-9, Psalm 23, I Corinthians 1:18-25, John 2: 1-12. (also Wisdom 7:22-8:1, the 21 attributes of Wisdom).**

Before reflecting on the Scriptures for this liturgy, I would, on the part of the Marianists like to thank the people of St. Luke's parish here in Beaver Creek who are here tonight to show their appreciation of Fr. Schoen's seventeen years of presiding at the Sunday Eucharist.

Like his Marianist family you are mourning his death and your loss of his presence not only at Masses but also at other services and social events. He loved you and showed his love by his dedication to you even up to this past Palm Sunday, his last Eucharist at St. Luke's. He was failing and both you and he knew it but he wanted to be with you in preparation for Easter.

I would like to share a few of the thoughts that were forwarded to me from some of you who are from St. Luke's and from others who knew and loved Tom. Then I will turn to the Scriptures and reflect on them in the light of Fr. Tom's Marianist life.

From people of St. Luke this is what they shared with me:

"Fr. Tom appeared to be a quiet, humble, gentleman. He displayed a funny, dry wit. He also appeared to be quite intelligent but did not discuss at St. Luke his professional life at U.D. That he was an educator showed in his homilies. He usually explained the readings in two ways. First as the people of the time when they were written would have understood them and then as to how we could/should apply them to our lives. He seemed quite knowledgeable about biblical times. He told me that when he got to heaven he would ask God about such and such—things he was curious about knowing.

Deacon Gerry Dupree, our deacon from St. Luke's said that Fr. Tom was very supportive of him and was open to his questions. He helped with his suggestions for homilies given by Gerry.

Another parishioner said that Fr. Tom was a wonderful homilist and took the confusion of the Bible for her. He shared what he discussed with the Wednesday faith group of

Marianists who studied and reflected on the coming Sunday's readings. Then, she compared his struggle to how Pope John Paul II accepted his last months and days. Another parishoner n said, "Fr. Tom is a saint. He was such an inspiration. She once told Fr. Tom that if people did not believe in God after knowing him it was their problem not his. Her husband said Fr. Tom Schoen walked in the steps of God.

People from Ascension and St. Helen's also appreciated Fr. Tom's service to them especially in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. He always gave the same penance!

A person named Ann said that the "Servant Song" was his favorite hymn. The first line is "Will you let me be your servant; let me be as Christ to you." The rest goes something like: "Pray that I may have the strength to let you be my servant too." That song fit Fr. Tom.

One of his former students in computer science visited Tom at Mercy/Siena and found out that he still had a record showing her name in his files. She remembered how he started classes without need of a book or notes. Once, in order to make an important point to get their attention he turned the lights off and told them to listen after turning them back on. She could only remember the lights being turned off! She also said Tom told the class about his love for two words "Found" and "Return" then she said he found God in the Scriptures and his vocation and returned to God through his recent death.

At Mercy/Siena Tom served as chaplain and almost daily gave a brilliant homily that never lasted more than three minutes. Fr. Tom Stanley appreciated this very much and had this to say: "He reminded me of Donald E. Knuth, a noted computer scientist who in 1990 published a book entitled 3:16. He took verse 3:16 from every book of the bible that had one, hired a calligrapher to do an artistic representation of those numbers and the verse. He added a scholarly explanation of the verses displaying some unique insights into scripture. Tom, like Knuth, displayed a similar ability to apply his computer science knowledge and intellectual training to the liturgical scriptural passages when he gave homilies. He regularly came up with unique and captivating insights and explanations. Those who heard his homilies testified to this. I certainly do.

Brother Frank Deibel who will be 101 in August said that Fr. Schoen would always go to chapel one hour before the regular Mass. He did this to make himself available to hear confessions and, I surmise, to commune with Jesus.

Brother Alex Tuss had this to say about his life in community. His love for bridge was a regular feature at 121 Sawmill back when he, Matt Kohmescher, and Ed Nuendorf lived there. Tom loved mystery novels. We have literally hundreds of mystery novels on metal shelves in the basement of 121 that Tom collected over thirty plus years he lived there. He had them all neatly shelved alphabetically and would systematically work his way through them and then, after reaching the end of the alphabet, begin again. Tom was a diehard Cubs fan, going back to his youth in Sioux City.

Turning to the Scriptures we discover how they help us understand Tom as a person of wisdom and knowledge. His mind and heart worked together and in my own preparation for sharing these texts with you I grew to appreciate the theme of wisdom as it was lived out by Tom. In fact, as I was reading from the Liturgy of the hours in Tom's Latin copy I discovered Psalm 107 speaking to me of Tom in its last verse:

*, "Who is the wise person? Such a one takes wisdom to heart and comes to understand God's faithful love."*

All of our readings for this evening have a wisdom theme that is appropriate for the celebration of Tom's life. Through accommodation they do characterize Father Tom as a person of wisdom. From his early years as a Marianist he manifested his gifts of intellect and knowledge but always within the framework of Wisdom. He assisted Fr. George Barrett, S.M. in the scholasticate where hundreds of Marianist brothers worked at completing their studies at the University of Dayton. His gift of organizing and helped not only Fr. Barrett but all of us brothers. His quiet leadership and assistance made the scholasticate at Mt. St. John a pleasant place to live and grow in the Marianist way of life.

In the Book of Wisdom, we discover that the inspired author lists twenty-one attributes of Wisdom. Tom developed these attributes through his studies, his community, and his prayer. Why twenty-one attributes? It was the biblical symbolic way of demonstrating the fullness of wisdom through three times seven—showing the fullness and greatness of God's Wisdom. In the selection from Paul's Letter to the

Corinthians Tom saw the mystery of the Cross as God's Wisdom and Power that confounded those who sought only signs and miracles as the basis of their faith; others, who were bound by their secular culture felt that only philosophical thought was wisdom. In what Paul understood through his conversion by believing in the Risen Christ was that the folly of the Cross was not only a foil for the ones who were scandalized but also for those who thought the preaching about Jesus crucified was sheer nonsense.

Tom lived out the Paschal Mysteries not only by his life but also how he shared them in his remarkable skill of getting to the heart of the scriptural message in a clear, succinct and compelling way.

Behind Paul's message are allusions and even a direct citation from Isaiah who helps not only Paul but all of us to see in Jesus the Suffering Servant of the Lord who brings salvation and healing to the whole world by his death on the Cross leading us through that death to his Resurrection. Patience and pondering led believers to understand the power and wisdom of God in the crucifixion of Jesus, who in the fullness of time was sent by God and born of a woman named Mary for the salvation of all humankind. The paradox of dying and yet rising becomes the wisdom of the Cross for God's chosen ones. Paul says, "Those called to understand this mystery of Christ the Paschal Lamb of God are themselves wisdom people."

Tom liked Saint Thomas Aquinas and would have used this succinct statement from the great doctor of the Church about those who considered the cross sheer foolishness, "People are accustomed to regard as foolishness whatever surpasses their understanding." Yes, Fr. Schoen had the kind of wisdom Paul was speaking about and displayed it through his serenity, his sensitivity, and his good and wise judgment.

During my stay at Siena Woods I was seated at table with Fr. Tom and had the pleasure and joy of listening to his interests and insights. ( I think I would have been at table with him at least one hundred times). Inever found one of his conversations dull. Tom sparkled them with his knowledge and wisdom.

Tom requested that the Wedding Feast of Cana be chosen for this Mass of Christian Burial. We may assume that he chose this because of the portrait of Mary that is given at this first of seven great signs. The Cana narrative opens up the public

ministry of Jesus in the Gospel of John. Isn't Mary acting with practical wisdom and creative intuition in her asking Jesus to do something about the lack of wine. The parents and relatives of the bride would have been shamed and held in dishonor for years after the event and its failure. Fortunately, Mary acted promptly and saved the joy of the celebration for all who were there. We realize her wisdom words as she speaks them to the chief steward: "Do whatever He tells you."

Service, hospitality, and concern for avoiding a crisis were displayed by Mary as she successfully alerted her son to the situation. Wasn't there some Jewish humor in the words that Jesus addresses to her as he quips, "Woman, what does this got to do with us?" Without blinking an eye she went ahead with her memorable and important theological words, "Do whatever he tells you." Tom Schoen would have found humor in this exchange with her son. One of the brothers in told me "Tom had the uncanny knack of finding humor in almost anything that seemed to go awry. For example he could even find humor in someone writing a bad check or making a bookkeeping mistake.

Tom was a genius in many areas—especially in mathematics. He would certainly have been aware that the author of the Fourth Gospel was counting the seven days of the new creation with the Cana event being the seventh day—a day of fullness and messianic abundance seen in the water of the six vats being changed into the equivalent of 120 gallons of wine. The scene has both a spiritual and sacramental side to its interpretation. Tom, of course, developed through his appreciation and love of the sacraments and his spirituality. In following Mary, Tom did so up to the time of his death. He was comforted by the scene at the foot of the Cross --so dear to all Marianists--and saw the completion of what had begun at the Wedding Feast of Cana. Here not only a Marian entrustment happened, but also the fullness of the Church's life was given to us in signs that recall Baptism and Eucharist. Blood and water now flowed from Christ's side just as water and wine were abundant at Cana. Tom knew that his "hour" had come and like Jesus he was surrounded by beloved disciples : his brothers, the staff, a Sister Judy, Judy Moehl, Brother Alex, and others. He was able to die peacefully in his own room at 2:15 P.M. on April 14, 2010, a Wednesday.

We are saddened at the loss of Tom. The people at Mercy/Siena are also mourning his death and miss his homilies; his dear friends , the pastor, deacon, and

parishioners of ST. Luke will miss his presence at Mass and at their social gatherings. Yet, he leave us with a message of hope and wisdom taken from the prophetic Book of Lamentations:

*But 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.*

*My portion is the Lord , says my soul: therefore will I hope in him.*

*Good is the Lord to one who waits for him, to the soul that seeks him:*

*It is good to hope in silence for the saving help of the Lord.*

*(Lamentations 3:21-26)*

Father Bert Buby, S.M.