

## Homily for Bro. Melvin Meyer, SM

Oct. 18, 2013

I want to begin my reflections with everyone this morning by expressing my sincere appreciation and deep gratitude to all of you for being here today as we pay tribute to a remarkable Marianist: born here in St. Louis and who has graced us with his art throughout our city, on this campus and in so many other places. I want to thank those of you who have traveled some distance to be here. I also want to thank those who worked so hard to assist me on this “celebration of life”: especially my Marianist brothers who live on this campus in the Cure of Ars community; the faculty and staff of Vianney for hosting this funeral; and the ambassador students who have done a remarkable job last night and today.

It is really hard to believe in many ways that our brother Mel has left us so quickly to make his final journey to the next life with our God. It has been quite a week since last Saturday when Bro. Mel passed away, on the feast of Our Lady of the Pillar, a feast important to us as Marianists and to Bro. Mel. It’s almost like he planned it for that day. That particular weekend was also our Marianist World Day of Prayer where we as Marianists in solidarity with our brothers all over the world prayed for you and our Marianist family. Bro. Mel is now at peace. He got his wish: he didn’t have to go to San Antonio.

Over the past week I have had many phone calls, emails, and texts from all over the U.S. as well as in faraway places like Hong Kong and Guatemala. Bro. Mel made a deep impression on all of you and on so many others who are here with us in spirit.

Imagine knowing a man born in a small town called Florissant, Missouri, the second of seven children who was one of the few among his peers to complete high school at a place called McBride run by the Marianists, later attending college, and then on to a masters degree with a major in art from the University of Notre Dame.

Imagine knowing this young man growing up in the depression era, learning to play an accordion and becoming a part of a band known as “the Pals of Swing” that played dances in and around his home town and who loved to dance the “jigger bug”.

Imagine knowing this same young man who becomes influenced by a childhood buddy named Buck Behlmann who said he was thinking about joining an organization called the Society of Mary because he loved their mission and suddenly this guy instantly says to his best friend Buck with enthusiasm, “*Hey, I’ll go with you*” and then

at the last minute your best friend Buck changing his mind and goes on to become a father of 16 children and this man becomes a Marianist brother.

Imagine knowing a man who was a religious in the 1950's having the opportunity for a full year to be in Europe to visit nine countries on a moped motor scooter and studied under some great artists in Fribourg, Switzerland and in Paris, France.

That man is the one we remember and celebrate today ... that man became an elderly man on a mission .. who wrote down the following words ... *"I owe everything to the Society of Mary for their faith in me. Life took on a new meaning and purpose when I embraced the Marianists."*

As you probably read in the *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, Bro. Mel had seven siblings, and three of them are with us this morning and on behalf of all of us we express our sympathy to Elsie, Audie and Gilbert. Mel told me on more than one occasion that he was very close to his mother and described himself as a *mama's boy*. He mentioned to me that it was the influence of his mother and of course his early years of training as a Marianist that helped him to be so close to Mary, the mother of Jesus. Now he is having a great time with all of them in heaven.!

Brother Mel came to a point in his life recently where he acknowledged his desire to die and to be with God and his family. He was prepared and he knew his time was limited. He told us over and over again in community meetings, *"I am ready"* and I think he wanted to give us some time to prepare. He also kept telling us over and over again, *"I am so sorry"* and we would ask him, Mel, what are you sorry about. And he would comment on how he just couldn't be as productive as he wanted to be. He couldn't help us out in community projects or even cooking breakfast as he once did for many years every Saturday morning. It was always the same thing ... but it was his way of contributing.

As a Marianist community four weeks ago we celebrated the sacrament of the sick and each one of us from the Cure of Ars community came forward and layed our hands on Brother Mel's head to bless him in our school chapel. Tears rolled down his face and ours and he expressed his gratitude. He kept saying .. thank you, thank you, thank you. Shortly thereafter I asked him if he was willing to do that before our student body as a public witness of his faith. He asked me why I thought he should do it and I said, you have told us Mel that you are ready to die. What a witness it would be for our students to really see, that all your life, you have lived with and for God, you've had this great relationship with Mary, the mother of Jesus, and now you are placing your

final days in His hands. You are a man of faith ... and you can be a great reminder to us ... that death is part of life.

In a very quiet way Bro. Mel said ok, whatever, whatever you want. But then he reiterated his one desire: he said, at my funeral, please have a reading about Mary, and please sing the Ave Maria. Our gospel that we just heard was that wonderful passage of Jesus saying to the beloved disciple, John, who is replaced today by Mel: ...*woman, behold your son; son, behold your mother.*

Bro. Mel is a very humble person and did not want to draw attention to himself on that day but he said yes to being anointed before the student body because he wanted in his own way to communicate to us ... it's going to be ok: I believe in the Resurrection and the Life; I believe I have lived a good life; I believe I have fulfilled my mission as a Brother of Mary. He echoed the spirit that we heard in that second reading ... "*the time of my departure has come .. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have kept the faith*". It turned out to be a beautiful Mass that we had when 12 students and faculty members came forward and laid hands on Bro. Mel's head and prayed over him and then I anointed him.

Bro. Mel got his wish: He kept saying to some of us ... *the only place I am going to go is across that road from the gallery ... to our Marianist cemetery.* After over 45 years on this property it seems only fitting that we have his funeral Mass here surrounded by his art that is everywhere on this property and throughout Kirkwood and St. Louis and surrounded by all of you.

The poet Yeats once described a good person as "blessed and had the power to bless." Brother Mel was just such a person ... blessed with the gifts of kindness, humility, compassion, simplicity, a generous heart, a magnanimous faith, the artist par excellence – and blessing all of us with his quiet presence and friendship, a man with few words but a man with a lot of action.

Today we come to this property with many memories of Brother Mel and offering support to one another. I encourage you to save and treasure those memories and share some of those stories at the luncheon that we have prepared for all of you following the mass or while browsing the art gallery which will be open. Listen for a moment to a couple of the many comments that have been made about Mel:

- *From Orlando, Florida: "We have lost a great friend . I will always cherish his works of art that hang in my home.*
- *From someone here in St. Louis: "His art studio was much akin to a cathedral, where art, faith, and God met.*
- *From Dayton, Ohio: "this man could make something from discarded materials and turn it into gold. Nothing was wasted, not even the bolts. He was a consummate recycler.*
- *In an email from the people connected with "Our Little Haven" "I will never forget his kindness to our children at Our Little Haven. He loved us and donated so many works for our children: the blue angel; the red angel; the baseball angel; the high chairs.*
- *In another email: "the gallery was like a sanctuary. One who entered there seldom left without an uplifted spirit."*
- *Finally from Guatemala: "when I remember Bro. Mel, the Spanish word chispazo comes to mind. That is to say a bright spark from the fire that burns intensely, an ember. The spark of Mel's life in the Society of Mary left an impression that is staggering. His artistic creativity is legend... He was in so many ways a Brothers Brother of Mary."*

I could read so many letters, cards, emails and texts about Brother Mel that we have received that acknowledge him as one who was born to love and to give love.

We have lost a dear friend, a beloved confrere and a wonderful relative, and it is a sorrowing experience. But our faith assures us that Brother Mel now rejoices in the new life promised by the Son of Mary whom he served so faithfully.

We thank you Brother Mel for being that faithful Marianist. May God bless You.

You fought the good fight. You finished the race. You kept the faith.

With that kind of victory, I think Bro. Mel and certainly his mother and father would be proud if we gave him now what he deserves: a round of applause!!

Fr. Timothy M. Kenney, S.M.  
Director of Cure of Ars Marianist Community