

**BRO. TOM OSTER'S FUNERAL**  
**JULY 19, 2014**

When it was clear that Fr. Marty Solma, our Provincial, was probably going to be in India when our brother, Tom, passed from this life, I was asked to be prepared to preside at his funeral. This past weekend I was about to leave for my annual retreat at St. Meinrad's Archabbey when I got the news that Tom had died. It is a tradition in our Province retreats to remember those who have died during the past year. Preparing for Tom's funeral became my own time to remember the deceased. And, then, on the last day of my retreat, we learned of the death of our brother, Paul Marshall.

Having met our brother, Tom, in Africa several times when I visited as member of the Provincial Council, I can testify that faith was a very important part of his life. Therefore, it is most appropriate that we turn to faith as we celebrate this day of his funeral. Our faith calls us to remember! Each time we gather around the table of the Lord to celebrate the Eucharist, we fulfill Jesus command "to do this in memory of me." Memory is important to us as Christians. Faith calls us to remember.

We are first and foremost called to remember the most important tenant of our faith—faith in the resurrection of Jesus. We remember too our faith in the creedal statement about our own resurrection from the dead and life everlasting. This truth is clearly proclaimed in today's first reading from Isaiah the prophet. In referring to Jerusalem, the holy mountain, where God dwelt in the temple, Isaiah proclaimed: "On this mountain God will destroy the veil that veils all peoples, the web that is woven over all nations; God will destroy death forever."

In the midst of our loss, it is important that we remember—that we remember to proclaim our faith. We are reminded again by the scripture of the God of promise. Isaiah evokes a powerful image of our God; Isaiah reminds us of our God, "to whom we looked to save us! This is the Lord for whom we looked; let us rejoice and be glad that he has saved us!"

Although Tom has passed from our midst, as Christians we remember our faith in the resurrection. Life is changed not ended. Tom has entered into life eternal with our God.

There is another kind of remembrance that we do at funerals. As Christians, we believe what is said in the book of Genesis; each of us is made in the image and likeness of God. Each person, then, reveals something of who God is. So today, we remember and give thanks for the gift that Tom has been in our lives, for the unique way he touched our lives and revealed God.

Ever since it was made known that I would preside and preach today, I have received a number of testimonies from Tom's fellow brothers about the unique impact he made on them. I was especially moved by the comments of our African brothers who lived with Tom during his many years of service to our Marianist mission there. Many of his brothers commented on his quiet, humble, and generous service to his fellow brothers and the community. If I quoted them all, we would be here for a long time. As one brother said, "Bro. Tom never talked very much nor did he have classes with us. . . but he certainly taught us many things by the very way he lived his Marianist life." Another brother wrote: "I think the best contribution from him was leading by example. He didn't say much but he did so much, we followed what he did, he was the first in the chapel, he was first to volunteer, he read most of the spiritual books and shared about them."

Tom's commitment to Jesus was clear. He clearly took to heart the words of today's Gospel: "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light." Although he would have been too humble to do so, Tom **could** easily have said to all of us: "Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart!"

Another quality of Tom's life is beautifully spoken in the second reading of today's liturgy. We hear from St. Paul: "For if we live, we live for the Lord, and if we die, we die for the Lord; then, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's." This living for the Lord is the fondest memory of our Provincial, Fr. Marty Solma, who asked me to share this reflection with all gathered here. (If this homily goes a little long, you can blame Fr. Marty. I am only being obedient to my Provincial!!)

Fr. Marty writes: "I am writing this from Budakata, India. Bro. Joe Kamis, Fr. Paul Marshall and I are visiting all of the communities of the District of India until July 20. This morning, I received word from Fr. Bill Meyer that Bro. Tom Oster died yesterday in Dayton. Although the news did not come as a surprise, it made me deeply sad.

*I have known Bro. Tom for almost 30 years, sharing many of those years in Africa together. The first time I met him in Lusaka, he wanted to teach me to make garlic mayonnaise. Imagine! But, that was for me only a sign of what I came to appreciate about Tom: his multiple talents and his incredible availability and helpfulness. Whether working on the school compound of Matero Boys Secondary School in Lusaka to ensure that the school facilities were properly maintained; living at the novitiate and helping to build stoves to heat the rooms during the cold July days; or staying with the temporary professed Brothers at the Bro. Vincent House in Nairobi, taking care of all the maintenance needs and improvements on that very large compound - in all of this Tom was handy, creative, and very serviceable.*

*For me, he was a good example of what I think Fr. Chaminade envisioned for the working Brothers at San Remy in France: Brothers deeply engaged with the physical world and deeply engaged in a contemplative life. For that is what was most important to Tom, especially in his later years. He was a searcher, a reader, and, above all, a pray-er. He led by example and loved our Lord and our Blessed Mother very much. Sadly, he less often appreciated his own talents and goodness, things recognized so easily by others. Bro. Tom gave his life to the Lord and the Society of Mary. He longed to know The Lord more deeply. Now, his deepest desire is realized beyond his imagination.*

*Thanks, Bro. Tom, for all that you have been for us. Now, do us the favor of praying for us, for our perseverance, and for our zeal for the Gospel."*

Fr. Marty's testimony clearly expresses Tom's desire to live for the Lord!!

It is appropriate that we celebrate this funeral in the context of a Eucharist, a word that means "thanksgiving." We thank God for the gift that Tom has been in our lives. As we gather as people of faith, let us **REMEMBER**:

- Let us remember our faith in the resurrection of Jesus that convinces us that for Tom live has changed not ended. Our faith is the source of our hope and healing

- Let us remember the gift that Tom has been in our life; how he imaged the humility, meekness, and generosity of Jesus; how he taught us that whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.

Let me conclude with a prayer often said at the bedside of someone nearing death. To our brother, Tom, we say:

"Go forth Christian soul, from this world  
in the name of God the almighty Father, who created you,  
in the name of Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, who suffered for you,  
in the name of the Holy Spirit, who was poured out upon you,  
go forth, faithful Christian.

May you live in peace this day,  
May your home be with God in Zion,  
with Mary, the virgin mother of God,  
with Joseph, and all the angels and saints."

Amen.