

Funeral Homily for Jim McKay, SM

From Matthew: "Although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike. Come to me and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart."

Relatives of Fr. Jim. The Marianist Family gathered here in Jim's honor.

First of all, it is indeed quite an honor for me to share some reflections on our readings as we remember this wonderful, wonderful man, Fr. James McKay. We give thanks for his life, we recall all the ways he has blessed us and we bid him farewell for now.

When I heard about his passing, and especially when asked to do this homily, I almost immediately thought of a book I've been reading recently. This book is rather unique in many ways. First, the author, David Brooks, says he wrote the book to save his soul and I believe it. He is a political pundit and political commentator. I don't know of any pundits who write to save

The name of the book is *The Road to Character*. In the introduction the author makes a distinction between resume virtues and eulogy virtues. Resume virtues are the ones you list on your resume. The skills you bring to the job market and that contribute to external success.

At the beginning of our liturgy we heard about Fr. Jim's resume virtues. He was a principal, a director, a president and a pastor. He was fluent in 8 languages. Quite a resume!

However, our eulogy virtues go much deeper. Eulogy virtues exist at the core of our being, in our soul i.e. whether we are kind, brave, honest, faithful, and especially whether we are humble. What kind of relationships we form.

The thesis of the book is that our culture in the USA today puts much more emphasis on resume virtues than eulogy virtues.

James McKay's eulogy virtues are even more impressive than his resume virtues. The author states that the central fallacy of modern life is the belief that resume virtues can produce deep satisfaction which is false. He believes, and I agree, resume virtues cannot produce deep satisfaction. Only eulogy virtues can produce deep satisfaction.

We have heard that before: "Although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned (resume virtues), you have revealed them to the childlike (eulogy virtues)."

There was indeed a childlike quality about Fr. Jim and he obviously experienced the deep satisfaction that is the fruit of the eulogy virtues. The fruit of character that came out in his warm and deep smile that was always there at the assisted living, the hospital and the nursing unit.

The author goes on to say that we develop the eulogy virtues best when our heart is warmed, when we come into contact with someone we admire and love. Someone with character. Then we consciously bend our lives to mimic theirs.

In Jim McKay's presence our hearts were always warmed. I know mine was. I just always felt better after being with him and I was supposed to be helping him. Perhaps it helped that he always had that little green pillow on his bed with the saying crocheted into it: If you are lucky enough to be Irish. You're lucky enough!" He had a warm, playful sense of humor that also helped to warm the heart.

Myron Achbach had Fr. Jim for his first director, at Cathedral Latin back in the late '50's and early 60's. Jim became principal and director. When Fr. Bode died in August right before school started, I asked Myron about Jim. The first thing he said was, "I loved Jim McKay." His character warmed our hearts.

The author, David Brooks, goes on to describe people with character. They possess inner cohesion. They are not leading fragmented, scattershot lives. They have achieved inner integration. They are calm, settled and rooted. They don't crumble in adversity. Their hearts are dependable. They have learned from joy and pain. That's a description of Jim McKay as I knew him.

The author also describes the life of several diverse individuals in history who Brooks believes walked the road to character. These individuals range from St. Augustine to Samuel Johnson to Dwight David Eisenhower, Dorothy Day among others. He found one pattern that always recurred in their lives. They had to go down first in order to go up. They had to descend into the valley of humility to climb to the heights of character. Humility was the key to the development of their character.

We call that the Pascal Mystery. The need to go down before you can go up. We believe it is at the core of the mystery of life. The need for all of us to go down, to die to ourselves, our own ego before new life is possible, new growth is possible.

"Come to me. I am meek and humble of heart."

Jim McKay was a humble man. He lived a life of dying to his own ego i.e. stepping in during a crisis and becoming principal and director when Fr. Bode died. As Myron said, I don't know that he really wanted to do that. Of course, Fr. Jim grew up as a member of the greatest generation and that generation valued humility. Putting one's ego aside and serving the common good. In the intervening decades, to a great extent, we have lost that value. According to David Brooks, and I agree, the consequences are evident in our society, especially in the political arena but in other areas also such as mass media.

No wonder when we see a humble man like James McKay or Francis, our pope that we take notice. Our society, our culture is sorely in need of recovering the value of humility.

We will sorely miss James McKay and men and women like him. We will miss his humble way and his childlike qualities. We, as Marianists, as members of the Marianist Family have a critical contribution to offer our society by sharing at this time our heritage of valuing humility. The heritage of a young girl, a humble maiden whose life was incredibly fruitful.

"Come to me. I am meek and humble of heart and you will find rest. "

That is why we come here together in this Eucharist for this funeral. We respond to the invitation. We come to the Divine One, who incredibly is also the humble human one who kneels down to wash our feet and who lays down his life for us in love. He invites us not only to come to him but follow him and be willing to kneel down and wash one another's feet. To lay down our lives for one another.

Thank you, Fr. Jim, for going before us on the road to character. For being willing to kneel down and wash our feet. For being willing to lay down your life for us. Thank you for your warm and humble heart, your warm smile and your warm character. May we continue to bend our lives toward yours since we have been lucky enough to know you, we have been lucky enough.

May you rest in peace.