

FUNERAL HOMILY  
Fr. Paul J. McGuire, SCJ  
Born May 31, 1942 – Died February 22, 2016

Dear Friends:

***“Were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?”***

We are all of us, I am sure, shocked by Fr. Paul Joseph McGuire’s untimely death. We gather to commend our brother to God with “a sure and certain hope” in God’s mercy and with great confidence in the merits of Fr Paul’s priestly & religious service. We intercede that God will take P.J. home where he may intercede for us and so continue in heaven that ministry that was cut short on earth.

There are few experiences in life that leave us feeling as helpless and confused and empty as does the experience of coming face to face with the death of someone we have known and loved. I am keenly aware that no words of mine can remove the sense of sorrow and separation that all of us are feeling at this time; no words can unbind the mystery of death. Yet the words of Scripture that we have heard and the prayers and rituals of this funeral rite give us consolation and cause for hope.

These words and prayers along with my condolences are offered to you his family, friends, colleagues, and community pained by the loss of your uncle and friend.

P.J., born on May 31, 1942 in Jersey City, New Jersey, was a Priest of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, founded by Father Leo John Dehon in 1878 at Saint-Quentin, France. He professed his vows of poverty, chastity and obedience on September 8, 1960. That’s almost fifty-six years ago. However, he often said, because his brother, Bob, was also an SCJ, that he was, in reality, a Priest of the Sacred Heart his whole life.

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Each of us will remember P.J. in our own way. He was first and foremost a Priest of the Sacred Heart – a brilliant and gentle priest. In Father Dehon’s own words: *our whole vocation, our purpose, our duty, our promises, are found in these words: Ecce venio, ... Ecce ancilla ...* He brought these words to life in so many ways. Sr. Agnes Cunningham, a friend of Fr. P.J.’s, at the Leo Dehon Lecture in 2003, said of P.J., *“Against the background of an understanding of priesthood as prophetic, priestly and pastoral, he has also set forth “The Priesthood of Leo Dehon.”* He spent the better part of his life reading, translating and teaching about the life and Charism of Leo John Dehon.

P.J. had a very keen intellect, a great reader, always striving to improve his knowledge and understanding of issues. He kept himself updated in many fields of learning – in world affairs, (he faithfully read the New York Times), theology, spirituality, the church and he had a great feel for liturgy. Like Fr. Dehon, *“he was aware of social evils; he had carefully studied their human causes, both individual and social.”*

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Throughout his life *“Uncle Paul”* maintained a very close relationship with his family for whom he had a deep affection, visiting them regularly. I remember how he called the three sons of Jim and Marybeth, *“the beastie boys.”* He was deeply interested in his family’s wellbeing and welfare. He participated in many family events and vacations through the years. In fact, up to the end he talked about going to Connecticut to baptize his great-great niece, Charlotte. How proud he was to be a great, great uncle.

P.J. loved the simple things of life and he lived life to the fullest. He was a New York Mets fan, a good cook, a lover of fine wine and good food.

He often said that if one could read, one could cook. It's also true that he never served a meal that he had not first tried on himself!

I am not trying to canonize P.J. He certainly had faults and failings like anyone else. Yes, he was stubborn, bull headed, single minded, obstinate and, at times, downright ornery. After all he was Irish and from New Jersey! And these were his positive traits! He did not suffer fools and had no trouble in dealing with them very charitably. He had a keen sense of humor and could toss one line zingers at the drop of a hat. Fr. Stefan, Director of Centro Studi Dehoniani, reminded me of a speech P.J. gave on Fr. Dehon's ideal of a teacher and how he portrayed Albus Dumbledore, the Headmaster of Hogwarts (Harry Potter) as the ideal Dehonian educator.

Above all, Fr. McGuire was a teacher who commanded such respect through his stillness of presence, and patient understanding. This power to teach was a gift from God. Immersed in academics most of his life, after completing his seminary studies at Sacred Heart Monastery, he earned both a master's degree and doctorate in theology from Fordham University.

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He was profoundly aware of his mission and committed his whole life to it—to lead others intimately to the Heart of Christ and by helping to restore Christ's Reign in individuals and in society.

He was a man with a passion for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This entailed for him interiorizing the values of the Gospel, the attitudes and sentiments of Jesus and modelling his own living on them. He broke open the word for all in his preaching.

Through his preaching of the Gospel, celebrating the Eucharist and the Sacraments, the witness of his own faith and prayer life, his work in the Dehon Study Center and his solidarity with the people he accomplished much in his 74 years of life. P.J. was a man of courage, conviction and

deep faith and these gifts, together with his admirable spirit of self-sacrifice, ensured he would be there for people, especially the youth of our province and of the Congregation in the Philippines, India, Vietnam, Rome and other parts of the world...to serve and minister to them, to teach them of the love of the Heart of Christ and of Leo Dehon.

Through P.J.'s ministry and service for and with the Priests of the Sacred Heart we all experienced the love of the Heart of Christ for us as something very real and tangible, which would touch us and bring hope, promise, and meaning to their life situations.

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We remember him fondly as a most engaging and caring person, a dedicated priest, a loyal friend. As we mourn his leaving us in death, it is important that we all remember we are a people of faith, hope and promise. The liturgy of the funeral mass is alive with the promise of new life. The Scripture Readings leave us in no doubt that death is the gateway to our true homeland, the passing over to true and lasting peace – ***“the souls of the just are in the hands of God; no torment shall ever touch them; they are in peace”***.

In death we share in the new life of the risen Christ. Life is changed, not ended as our preface prayer of the mass reminds us. Yes in death there is closure to our earthly life and pilgrimage.

For Fr. Paul Joseph McGuire, SCJ his earthly journey has come to an end. He has left behind a rich harvest, the full extent of which is known only to the Lord and the many people enriched by his life and work. He devoted himself heart and soul to the Heart of Christ. This gave meaning and inspiration to his life.

The Congregation has lost a great expert in our Dehonian Spirituality, a great man and religious.

We can almost hear the Master saying: *“Well done, my good and faithful servant. Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you great responsibilities. Come; share your master’s joy.”*

A song that we occasionally have the opportunity to sing in the liturgy has the refrain: *“We remember, we celebrate, we believe.”* Today, as we celebrate this Funeral Mass for the eternal repose of the soul of P.J. McGuire, we too **remember**, we **celebrate**, we **believe**.

*“Were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us on the way. Amen.”*