

Remembering Fr. Robert B. Tucker, SCJ

Funeral Homily (February 6, 2021)

Fr. Ed Kilianski, SCJ (US Provincial Superior, Priests of the Sacred Heart)

“My hope is that we will discover hearts burning within us as Christ speaks to our hearts and that we will come to know him in the breaking of the bread and to know him in the faces of our brothers and sisters. Because, as Number 82 in our Constitutions challenges us: ‘the Eucharist has its effects on all that we are and do... and who unceasingly throws us back onto the streets of the world in the service of the Gospel.’”

-Fr. Bob Tucker, SCJ

Dear Friends,

Slightly after 1:00 pm on Saturday, January 23rd, Fr. Bob Tucker, SCJ, our brother and friend died. He was 68. Originally from Detroit, MI, he professed his First Vows (along with Gary Lantz, myself and nine others) on June 25, 1975 and was ordained a priest on October 16, 1982.

The quote from Bob that I began with is part of his reflection on the Gospel that was read at our religious profession (the beginning of his religious life and that we read today at the end of his life). The Gospel of the appearance on the Road to Emmaus so marked his life as a Priest of the Sacred Heart.

To Bob’s brother, Michael, and sister-in-law Trina, his brother-in-law, and many nieces and nephews, and their families, I extend to you the deepest sympathies of the Priests of the Sacred Heart on the death of your brother and uncle.

Your family has been very generous to the Priests of the Sacred Heart, having shared your brother with us.

Father Bob was also a brother to us, the Priests of the Sacred Heart, and for that reason we are here to celebrate this Mass of Christian burial. Our religious brotherhood is a special bond that unites us all to Bob; it is a bond of solidarity and communion, and it is expressed in a powerful way through this celebration of the Eucharist. This special bond that we all share is “stronger than death” itself.

In the reading from the Book of Wisdom, we heard that ***“the souls of the just are in the hand of God and no torment shall touch them... chastised a little, they shall be greatly blessed, because God tried them and found them worthy of God’s self... they are in peace.”*** These are beautiful words that Bob truly believed. In recent years, Bob had struggled with a respiratory disorder that led to a lung transplant last July 1st. He never fully recovered from the transplant

and moved into palliative care shortly before his death. Fr. Quang, Fr. Jim Schroeder and Mary Balistreri were with him when he died. As his body weakened these past weeks, months and years, he never gave up, never gave in; he fought the good fight and I know that God has found him worthy, ***“and the faithful shall abide with God in love.”***

Fr. Bob loved liturgy and celebrating the Eucharist, so much so that he chose the readings for this celebration and is speaking to us through them. He chose all the music... and the cantor (Mary McDonald) and he chose the celebrant! He wanted to make sure we got it right.

As most of you know, Bob and I were friends since he arrived at our Chicago Formation Program in 1973. Throughout the years, there were a times when we lived and served together in community and ministry Those were very special years for me and I hope for Bob. For 48 years he was my best friend, my confidant and my brother and I am missing him so very much.

This homily, however, is not about our friendship but a celebration of Bob’s life and ministry as an SCJ. Wherever Bob was assigned, as quiet as he often was, he was known as ***“the little man with the BIG voice,”*** (a name given to him by a parishioner at the former Holy Assumption Parish here in Franklin). Wherever he was assigned he left an impact on the people he was called to serve and SERVE he did! He was one of the best listeners I’ve ever known, and his insights and counsel were profound. ***“Be gentle with yourself”*** was a phrase he used often with many people.

In 2017 he reflected about his ministry and said: ***“As a priest, I have had the pleasure of celebrating the wonder of the love of the heart of Jesus in the celebration of the Mass. I have ministered in San Antonio, Detroit, Franklin, Houston and in northern Mississippi.”***

In addition to the Gospel of the Road to Emmaus, everyone who knew Bob knew how much he loved the parable of the Prodigal Son, that he memorized the parable and could preach on it from his heart. Once Bob was preaching to children and he asked them who they thought suffered the most in the parable, and one little boy responded, ***“The fatted calf!”*** How true! Made me laugh too.

Bob also had a fascination with the movie and story, the **Wizard of Oz**. Tom Tucker, a former SCJ, referred to Bob ***“as our little lion.”*** Bob always styled himself as the cowardly lion who actually has plenty of courage in the Wizard of Oz.

The movie and its story is really a metaphor for Bob’s life. He left his home in Detroit and faced all sorts of difficult, scary, and trying things throughout his life. But like the Scarecrow, the Tinman and the Cowardly Lion, Bob discovered that he had **the smarts**, was **very brave**, and **loved deeply and faithfully** from his **heart**. Then he just had to click his heels and he went back home to God, because ***“Home is always best and there’s no place like home.”***

Bob Tucker was short of stature, but bold in Fr. Dehon’s call to speak out.

“My call to religious life was nourished by the Priests of the Sacred Heart [said Fr. Bob] who came to my home parish in the inner city of Detroit. It was then that my love for liturgy began to

grow. I often reflect on the Gospel passage proclaimed when I took my first vows with the congregation in 1975: 'While Jesus was with them at table, he took the bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him... They said to each other, 'Where not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?''

*"Throughout my 42 (now 45 years) as a member of the Priests of the Sacred Heart I have recalled and reflected on this passage often. I see in this gospel what our baptism and our life as SCJs calls us to do; **that is to listen and to reflect on God's Word speaking to our hearts.** In order that we may come to know Jesus in the breaking of the bread. Recognizing Jesus in the breaking of the bread sends us forth to be **prophets of love and servants of reconciliation.**"*

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 Gospels. This entailed for him internalizing 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. He was also a man of compassion, a man of love. He truly knew how to be with people, especially the weak and most vulnerable.

Bob loved to teach others about sharing the Eucharist. Reflecting on his ministry of formation, he said:

"It is a privilege to be with our (young) religious students and candidates in their journey as they discern their calling in life to be a member of the Congregation of the Priests of the Sacred Heart. My hope is that we will discover hearts burning within us as Christ speaks to our hearts and that we will come to know him in the breaking of the bread and to know him in the faces of our brothers and sisters. Because, as Number 82 in our Constitutions challenges us: 'the Eucharist has its effects on all that we are and do... and who unceasingly throws us back onto the streets of the world in the service of the Gospel.'"

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."**

Bob is now reunited with his mom and dad and his sister Gloria and many others.

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 Eucharist and the life and ministry of Robert Bruce Tucker, we too **remember, we celebrate, we believe.**

"Were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us on the way." Rest now, my friend in peace!