

Father Gole (Mass of Resurrection)

I want to begin my reflection by expressing, on behalf of the Priests of the Sacred Heart, our sympathy to Father Gole's family: his grand nephews and nieces and their families and to all those who mourn Fr. Gole's loss. I also want to thank all those who gave so much of themselves in generous service of Father Gole in the last years and days of his life. I know the names of some who are part of the Priests of the Sacred Heart: Father Jim Brackin and Brother Mathew Miles, Marge Lirette and June. Then there is Helen, a very dear friend, who was always there and who did so much to prepare this celebration of Father Gole's life, Carl who handled legal matters for him, the wonderful nurses and staff at the Congregational Home. When you list names you are bound to miss some folks. I ask you to forgive me for that and I am sure I speak for the Priests of the Sacred Heart when I ask you to accept our sincere expression of gratitude for all that you have done and for who you have been in Father's Gole's life.

The text I chose for the gospel reading is not one that is very common for a funeral liturgy, but it gives us a context for honoring and celebrating the life of Father Gole. The reading has some pretty powerful words about not letting ourselves be called "teacher", "father" or "master," because we are all sisters and brothers to one another and we have only one Father (our God/Abba) and our only Master is Christ. This strong comment about not using these titles needs to be taken in the context in which these words are placed on Jesus's lips by the gospel writer. Jesus is addressing these words to those who demanded and delighted in being called by these titles without paying the price of earning those titles. They did not live up to what we have a right to expect in someone who bears such a title. They were just in it for the show, the vesture, the places of honor at the synagogue or at banquets, the special kinds of greetings as they moved about. And worse still, as Jesus says, they piled up heavy burdens and placed them on the shoulders of others without lifting a finger to help. That stands in sharp contrast to what Jesus says about himself: "come to me all you who labor and are heavily burdened and I will give you rest." That is what we look for in one we call "teacher" and "father." Father Gole tried to be deserving of both of those titles.

I am 76 years old and I still could not bring myself to call him "Joseph" or even "Father Joe." He was always Father Gole to me and not because I felt distant from him. The affection and respect that I have for him just made it seem fitting to me to call him by that name. I know that many people here and many who were not able to be here have experienced that aspect of Father Gole's life. The members of St. John the Evangelist parish have had him as leader in prayer at Mass and other priestly ministry. He listened to your concerns and companioned you in hard times and celebrated your joys. Many others who may not have been members of that particular parish came to Father Gole for advice and pastoral support. The pictures on display at the funeral parlor showed that he became a treasured part of your families. The Knights of Columbus in the area enjoyed his being a part of their lives as their chaplain. All of that shows how Father Gole tried to be someone people could come to when they were weary or heavily burdened. He provided a safe haven, a place of rest. He did what he could to live up to being called Father and all that we associate with that title in its most beautiful sense.

Father Gole came into my life when I began my theological studies in preparation for ordination to the priesthood. Father Gole was not a professed member of the Priests of the Sacred Heart, but he was responsible in part for the formation of all the SCJs moving on toward priesthood in the years between 1950 and 1975. I don't know the exact figures, but that is quite a crowd (and for those of you know us) a motley one at that. So my first acquaintance with Father Gole was as TEACHER. He found his place in the world and meaning for his life in teaching. That was what gave purpose to his existence. It is what he lived for. We learn to teach from those who taught us and then we learn to make adjustments. I saw that adjustment taking place in Father Gole's life. He must have had some very strict teachers, because he was very strict and demanding in class. But we saw other sides of Father Gole as teacher. Fr. Gole demanded a lot of memorization which was more challenging for some people than for others. Fr. Gole told me a story about one of his students (Father Tom Fix, who I trust is enjoying a reunion with Father Gole in heaven.) Tom was asked to recite the names of all the books in the Bible. Tom hesitated for a moment and said: Father, I can't recite them but I can sing them for you. Father Gole let him proceed and so Fr. Gole's office echoed with the names of all 72 books in the Bible to the

tune of the Yellow Rose of Texas.

He also had a unique way of encouraging a student who might be floundering in giving a response to a question Fr Gole had asked. As Fr. Gole sensed the student knew the material and was struggling with just how to put it together, he would wave his hands in the air and say: "keep kicking, keep kicking; you'll get it" (as if he were encouraging someone thrashing around in a swimming pool.)

The memory of Fr. Gole as teacher that I especially cling to is what happened one day while he was asking questions about material we had covered in a previous class. When you are studying theology you learn a lot of jargon, words that are not used commonly but are used in explaining theological principles. So after one of the guys had answered a question and answered it well, Fr. Gole just looked at him and said: "Now say it to me the way you would say it to your grandmother." I will never forget that. It is such a solid principle for teaching or preaching. We need to use words that are in every day usage and not the terms limited to scholarly text books.

When Fr. Gole retired from teaching he continued to teach by being a supportive presence to the students here at Sacred Heart School of Theology. It is quite a transition to move out of the business world into the classroom and the seminarians appreciated talking with him and just having fun with him. I recall one time when one of the students named Ed Flynn was experiencing a lot of stress over some upcoming exams. Fr. Gole saw him and called out: "Eddie, Eddie, come into the light here so everyone can see how beautiful you are!!"

I think Fr. Gole was able to be a true Father and teacher because he always remembered that Jesus Christ is his and our only Master. Jesus was the center of his life. He so missed not being to offer Mass as his health deteriorated. He was always faithful to prayer, especially the Liturgy of Hours, the official prayer that deacons and priests pray daily for the Church. One author put it this way: when we pray, we give the Church back to God. When we pray, we acknowledge that the Church is the People of God and they belong to God, not to us. As Fr. Gole prayed, he handed the People of God to God's loving care. So in my book he will always be Father Gole, a faithful priest and a committed teacher.

In the reading from the book of Job there are these powerful lines: "I know that my Vindicator lives...and from my flesh I shall see God." The word that is translated as "vindicator" in our text is the word GO'EL in Hebrew and it expresses a very significant theme in Hebrew culture and faith. The GO'EL was the person who rescued a relative who may have been sold into slavery. Or if someone's property were sold and would pass from the family's ownership, the GO'EL had the first claim to buy it back and keep it in the family. The GO'EL would avenge the blood of a family member who had been killed. He would take the wife of a deceased family member who had died without having children so that his lineage would continue. So although this word is often translated as "vindicator" or "redeemer" its basic meaning has to do with protection. The way we would talk about it in our colloquial language would be to say: "I've got your back." The GO'EL was someone you could depend on, someone who had your back. Fr. Gole, and we with him, believe that God has our back. God is on our side and will protect us and in the end we shall see our God. That is our faith, our belief. As Fr. Gole aged he talked to me about using his time to prepare for death. When Fr. Gole taught us he referred to his exams as a "WALK". That meant HE walked up and down the aisles of the classroom and fired questions at us. When he told me that he was preparing for death--with tongue in cheek I said: "So you are getting ready for the final exam, the BIG WALK." He chuckled as he knew what I was alluding to.

Our reading from the book of Revelation has this very consoling image of the world to come. It speaks of a new heaven and new earth, where the Lord will wipe away every tear from our eyes, where there is no more death, no mourning, no pain. God will make all things new and will satisfy our thirst. And then God says: I will be your God and you will be my son. I believe this reading was chosen because it so fits Fr. Gole's life story. He didn't talk about it very much with me, but alluded to the hardships he had had in life, especially in the concentration camp. I felt those hard times affected him profoundly and he always carried scars from those terrible experiences. At last all of that is over now and is wiped out as Father Gole is held in God's loving embrace. He thirsted for the peace that only God can give and that thirst is now satisfied and God receives Fr. Gole as his faithful son.

I want to draw my reflection to a close with words that Fr. Gole and I always used when we spoke with each other on the phone when I would call him from Chicago. My first words would always be: VIVAT COR JESU, Fr. Gole! That is the traditional greeting among Priests of the Sacred Heart. The Latin words mean: "may the heart of Jesus live." Fr. Gole was an honorary SCJ so I always greeted him that way. And he would give the traditional answer: PER COR MARIAE, which means "through the heart of Mary." When our conversation was over, we would both say: "oremus pro invicem," which means: let us pray for each other. So that is how I end: Fr. Gole, oremus pro invicem. We will pray for you and we ask you to pray for us.

--Fr. John Czyzynski