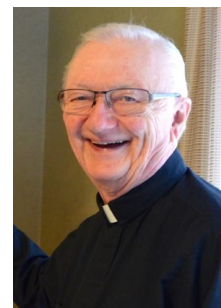


Funeral Homily
Fr. Austin Michael Burke, SCJ
October 14, 1937—February 9, 2017



Dear friends:

Every funeral Mass is an act of faith. This Mass for Fr. Michael Austin Burke is one such act of faith. Through the Eucharist we place our trust in God and in God's mercy; we trust in the welcome which God will extend to those who love Him; we trust in His loving Providence in our lives.

From this act of faith, we draw great consolation, especially at this time of sadness and mourning. We draw consolation as community and as family. I extend my condolences to Fr. Austie's family, to all the Priests of the Sacred Heart and to all his friends, especially the Knights of Columbus, who have gathered this morning to celebrate this act of faith. Together we draw consolation from our faith.

Every Mass of Christian burial is also an act of remembering, **gratefully**, a life which has been an unfolding of the Providence of God. May the Lord give us peace as we remember and celebrate the life of Michael Austin Burke.

We gather here in Sacred Heart Chapel to entrust Fr. Michael Austin Burke into the "hand of God" (Wisdom 3:1). Yet, as we do so, we find comfort because it is the Lord's hand into which we commend him.

The Lord first stretched out his hand to Austin Burke, son of Mary Ellen Jennings and Walter Burke, in the waters of baptism 79 years ago at Little Flower Catholic Church in Chicago, Illinois. As the waters washed him clean of original sin, the Lord Jesus welcomed him as a member of his Body and opened the doors of his Church to him. **Looking back on his life**, we know that the hand of the Lord never abandoned Mike, but remained constantly with him.

The Lord stretched out his hand to Austin Burke in the sacrament of Penance time and again, when he lifted him up from the misery of sin.

The Lord stretched out his hand again in Holy Communion as he continually offered himself to him, both as a foretaste of heavenly glory and to strengthen him to follow Christ more faithfully.

The Lord stretched out his hand to Austin, giving him his new name, Michael, on September 8, 1956 as he professed his first vows to the Lord as a Priest of the Sacred Heart and again on December 22, 1963 as Michael was ordained a priest at Alverno College in Milwaukee. Fr. Michael Austin Burke, in turn stretched out his hand, on behalf of the Lord, as a priest for 53 years, administering the sacraments and bringing the love of the Heart of Jesus to all whom he served.

The Lord stretched out his hand to Very Reverend Michael Austin Burke when he was elected as the ninth provincial superior of the US Province in 1983.

After completing his second term in 1989, the Lord stretched out his hand once more as he was named novice master for the international novitiate in Toronto. Fr. Mike continued in various formation and vocation roles until his retirement in 2009, and though slowed by age and illness; Mike always remained active until the end.

(In preparing for this homily, I asked the former provincials to share a brief reflection about Mike...)

John Klingler, SCJ said:

“He was a humble man. Talked little about himself and seldom talked (gossip) about others. He was good at giving his time to others. **He was IRISH and so proud about it.** He was vice provincial when I was provincial. We made a good team.”

“**Whatever**” was a word he used often.....Johnny concluded by writing: I got to go....still packing. With you and all the scjs at Mike's funeral. Johnny

John Czyzynski, SCJ wrote:

“When Ed asked me to write a “very brief reflection or recollection” of Mike Burke that he could include in his homily, I thought about a passage in the Acts of the Apostles. As the early Church began to spread to Antioch and other places, the Christians in Jerusalem wanted to send someone there who could find out what was going on and then report back about what he heard and learned. The text says that they chose to send Barnabas “because he was a good man, filled with the Holy Spirit and with faith. **Mike Burke is**

Barnabas in spades. Mike was just a good man. I was blessed to have known him for 65 years and **he has blessed our community just being who he was and he modeled for all of us what it means to be a good religious, a good Priest of the Sacred Heart.**”

Richard MacDonald, SCJ wrote:

“Thanks for the opportunity to comment about Mike. He has been a friend for so long and I always thought he cared about me a lot. Of course we go way back to our Donaldson days and he often helped me in my own struggles in the community. To me Mike was first of all an SCJ, he loved the community and in his own quiet way I suspect that I am not the only one who was impressed by his loyalty and generosity. I think the last time I was with Mike was on Election Day at Sacred Heart at Monastery Lake community. We all know that Mike was a Chicago Democrat who I think rejected the separation of Church and State. Mike told us *“that Hilary would win by a landslide.”* The saying is that you can take the Democrat out of Chicago ... but Mike **was** a Chicago politician.

As our Provincial, he worked hard to help us be better SCJs. Times were not easy in Raymondville in those years but his support leaves me grateful and blessed. When his term was up, he went back into the ranks. His priorities were serving the Church and the poor and I could not shout that any louder about Mike. His life was a gift to our Province and Congregation. May his memory stay with us. I loved Mike Burke and I knew he loved me too.”

Tom Cassidy, SCJ

I hope this is what you were looking for. Here’s my brief reflection on Mike Burke.

“In **Our Rule of Life #95** we read: *This primacy of love [Sint unum] calls for constant conversion and must bring us to availability for service of God and of his brothers and sisters, above all the poorest and weakest, in the spirit of the Ecce venio.*

If asked to summarize a life in a single word, **AVAILABILITY**, would describe Mike Burke to a T. **He served and ministered to the best of his ability wherever he was sent.** I have no doubt if asked; he’d say **his work with the Native Americans was in many ways his first love.** But whatever

assignment he was given, was done in a quiet and gracious manner respective of others.

I had the opportunity to work on the provincial staff when he was provincial. He tackled some difficult issues and while the word “Adrian” (as in Michigan) still raises hackles in some, I think, if asked he’d say perhaps there were other ways to go about it, but, confronting the reality of our diminishing numbers was something we needed to do. Mike kept an even keel, at least looking from the outside. Through it all, Mike never held a grudge and weathered the storms. I think, *(from 8000 miles away in India)*, the testament to that is simply the response around the province to his passing.”

Steve Huffstetter

Mike was provincial during my formation years, and was a great support through the final vows and ordination processes. He loved the community gatherings and had a wonderful way of reaching out to friends and families. He gave quality time to each individual, and always had time to talk.

While I am so grateful for his years of service in administration, my most lasting impression of the quality of Mike’s personality comes second hand. During my years in South Dakota, I met so many alumni from St. Joseph’s Indian School who were young children during Mike’s time in Chamberlain. Those were the lean and difficult years at St. Joe, with tight budgets, a short staff and overcrowded dormitories. But the students of Mike’s era spoke of the joyful memories of the ways he interacted with and cared for them as children. He kept contact with many over the years, and whenever he came to visit us on the rez or at the school, there were always folks waiting to see him again. He was loved and will be greatly missed.

To me personally, as the fifteenth Provincial of our province, I have been truly blessed to receive Mike’s support, counsel and wisdom...but only when I asked.

The Lord stretched out his hand, once more, to Mike in the Anointing of the Sick last Thursday, February 9th as he strengthened and supported him with his grace in his final hours so that his hope would be “full of immortality” (Wisdom 3:4). He faced his death with dignity, simplicity, a peacefulness and, I might add, with a sense of humor—the same way he lived his religious

life and priesthood. He was surrounded by members of his religious community throughout the day and then, in the evening, with John Czyzynski (his classmate and life-long friend) and Bill Pitcavage at his side, he breathed his last breath.

Reflecting on his own vocation, Fr. Mike said, “that it was important to belong to a congregation that is dedicated in a special way to the Sacred Heart, ‘promoting the love of God through service to his people’.”

He continued: “I wanted to be of service to others and serve through the Church. Fr. Dehon’s ‘prophets of love and servants of reconciliation’ fit my vocation. I was especially impressed with the SCJs’ emphasis on service to the poor and most needy in our world.

I have appreciated and valued our shared life together as SCJs. I find in it a source of support and encouragement. While there are many different personalities and ministries in our community we all share and experience the love of God and we desire to share that experience with others. This is what binds us and supports us in our ministry.”

And even now, at this very moment, the Lord stretches out his hand to Austin Michael Burke, to escort him into that “dwelling place in our Father’s house.”

I believe, the Lord stretches out his hand to each of us every day of our lives, but, he never forces us to take his hand. He offers it to us freely, and with his hand comes his grace, his power and his love. Jesus requires only our acceptance and that we stretch out our hand to his.

To take the Lord’s hand, as Mike did, day after day...can be risky and even frightening, for he leads us into the unknown and asks us to follow him in trust. Fr. Michael Austin Burke trusted the Lord throughout his life because of the promise it offered, that “those who trust in him shall understand truth, and the faithful shall abide with him in love” (Wisdom 3:9) because, as Jesus says of himself, “*I am the way, and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*” (John 14: 6).

If we take the hand of Christ each day and follow where he leads, not counting the cost, then we “*shall abide with him in love, because grace and mercy are with his holy ones*” (Wisdom 3:9) and, “*the Father will honor whoever serves me*” (John 12:26).

Let us then commend Fr. Michael Austin Burke into the hand of God. May the Lord honor his servant and welcome him into the mansions of his glory, that, having taken his hand, Fr. Michael Austin Burke might see his Savior face to face.

Michael:

“May the road rise up to meet you.
May the wind be always at your back.
May the sun shine warm upon your face;
the rains fall soft upon your fields
and until we meet again,
may God hold you in the palm of His hand.”

Amen.