

Dn. David Nagel's homily for Fr. Bill Pitcavage's funeral

March 25, 2019

Good Shepherd Chapel, Sacred Heart at Monastery Lake

In the Gospel we read; "As he drew near to the gate of the city, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow."

What was going on in Jesus' mind when he saw the widow? Did he think to himself before long my mother will be a widow without a son to watch over her? Did he remember how difficult life was when St. Joseph died and he and his mother were alone?

In the Jewish culture a widow could be destitute without a family member or someone coming forward to provide for her needs. Did Jesus say to himself I know what that widow is going through, now she alone without anyone to provide for her?

"A large crowd from the city was with her." The reading tells us that the funeral procession was outside of the city gate and coming close to the place of burial. The crowd was large possibly because they felt extremely sorry for her, the widow, who just lost her only son, and was now alone in the world.

The procession is approaching the final resting place. Moved with pity Jesus tells the widow not to weep. He takes the time first to address the grieving mother and this stops the coffin bearers.

The command from Jesus is simple; "I tell you to arise." The son is raised to life and Jesus gives him to his mother. Jesus' simple but powerful word is a command that brings life, this word is spoken by Jesus who is touched by the sorrow of a mother. The power of prayer in the midst of tragedy is the gift Jesus gives. The biggest tragedy we can face is the loss of someone we love.

After this action the widow finds renewed hope for a good life because she has her son back! A son, who will marry, provides grandchildren, and gives comfort to her in her old age.

Fr. Bill was the type of person who could not pass by someone hurting without a kind word, a gentle touch, or a prayer.

If you knew him at all he was famous for how he cared for the sick. Late night you could find him at the bedside of someone ill, praying with them and spending time with them.

He was a good listener and always ready to stop and share a word. You might say he was in the know about lots of things!

The parishioners in Chamberlain, South Dakota remarked how kind he was to those with major health issues and traumas in their lives. Like Jesus he stopped the coffin bearers and went to the one who was weeping and in need of comfort. He touched them in prayer and understanding.

In the reading from Romans we hear that Christ died and came to life, that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living. So why do you judge or look down on your brother or sister? We shall all stand before the God to account for ourselves.

I am reminded how often Fr. Bill leapt right into a friendship with someone who seemed so different from me or others I knew. What was it that made him so open to those who appeared to fall outside what I think is normal? His embrace went out to those on the fringe whether in the SCJ community or in ministries in which he served. He did not stand in judgment of his brother or sister.

When he served at pastor of St. James Parish in Chamberlain, South Dakota he remembered where everyone sat for Mass. And if you missed Mass a couple of times he might ask you upon leaving Mass where you were last week. Of course some people were defensive and would try to sneak out the side door but others found it comforting to know that Fr. Bill cared about them. He was open to listening and to supporting those with difficulties and sorrows.

In the reading from Isaiah we hear these words of encouragement; “Behold our God, to whom we looked to save us! This is the Lord for whom we looked; let us rejoice and be glad that he has saved us!

I think this is the motto that Fr. Bill lived by. Look to the Lord for he is our salvation. You could find Fr. Bill at prayer in the Good Shepherd Chapel late at night. He believed in dedicating two hours a day to prayer and being in the presence of the Lord. His life centered on his relationship with Jesus.

This was a message that Fr. Bill tried to set before others. When he served in South Africa he was very involved in RENEW and when he came to the parish in Chamberlain he also started a RENEW program.

The mission of RENEW is to empower individuals and communities to encounter God in everyday life, deepen and share faith, and connect faith with action. Fr. Bill lived his life encountering God in everyday life and putting his faith into action.

What more can I say . . . As Isaiah stated; “Behold our God, to whom we looked to save us! Let us rejoice and be glad that God has saved us!