

Funeral Homily for Brother Benedict (Gerald) Humpfer, SCJ  
June 9, 1944—December 31, 2017  
Professed August 28, 1966  
John 15: 9-17 Love One Another

Dear Friends,

If you were going on a long trip, what would you say to your family, your friends or your community before you left? If you knew that you were going to see someone for the last time, what would you say to that person? My guess is you would probably give them some instructions, some words of advice or tell them that you love them. In the Gospel we just heard Jesus gave his disciples and us some final words of advice. This Gospel is part of the final instructions that he gave them the night before he died. He spoke to them about loving each other and serving one another.

In St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, he too speaks about love. He tells us that love is patient and kind. It is not jealous or pompous; nor inflated or rude; it is not quick-tempered...it bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

These two scriptures were the two readings that Bro. Ben Humpfer had selected for his funeral mass. These passages, in effect, are his last words to us, to each of us. "This I command you: love one another."

Jesus knew that the disciples would not find love in the world. He knew that the world would largely hate them and his message. Nevertheless, we, like the disciples, are called to love each other and all people in spite of opposition or resistance. When we love each other, we experience the joy of loving God.

When we love one another, we allow the Holy Spirit to dwell in us and grow in us. How it grows will depend on our connection to each other, to God and to his church. The stronger our faith, the more we will do, and it is the things that we do for God and for others that bring glory to God and strengthen the Holy Spirit within us.

I believe Brother Ben knew this love of Christ throughout his fifty-one years of religious life as a Priest of the Sacred Heart. He lived these scriptures in his dedication and commitment as a religious Brother.

Born June 9, 1944 in Hammond, Indiana he was the only child of his parents Verona and Carl Humpfer. Gerald John Humpfer professed his first vows on August 28, 1966 and took the name by which we called him, Benedict.

Brother Ben lived his religious life mostly in service to our religious congregation in support services, mostly as a cook, at Sacred Heart Novitiate and at Divine Seminary. As a good religious, he went wherever he was assigned by his superiors and did whatever was asked of him. So he served at Villa Maria, at Vocation Central and at Sacred Heart Residence in Pinellas Park, Florida. He ministered also as a religious education teacher in Walls, MS, as director of Religious Education at Queen of Peace in Olive Branch, MS and as chaplain at St. Joseph's Indian School in South Dakota.

Dear friends, it's not what he did that was significant; but who he was that we remember today. I have longed believed, that in many ways, our religious brothers are the true keepers of our charism, the charism of our founder Leo Dehon. Brother Ben was certainly one of the keepers of the charism.

Ben was a true gentleman. He was a gentle man. Always present at prayer, mass and adoration until he became ill, on special occasions he would dress up with his very stylish vests and sweaters. He was a good cook and very meticulous in everything he did. He loved Christmas and decorating his room or apartment with his Dickens Christmas village. In fact, he decorated for every season of the year.

He was not perfect; none of us are. But he did his best for love of God and love of the Congregation. (Example at Vocation Central)

If Ben were here at this moment, I believe he would tell us that “love for others means being willing to die for others. Jesus showed his love for us by dying on the cross for our sins. Ben was willing to sacrifice his desire, his life for others, for the SCJ community. He was willing to go out of his way for others by coming to the aid of those who were in need--even at his own personal expense. Jesus showed how far that type of love can take someone when he died for us. If Jesus could lay down his own life for us, what part of our lives can we give up for others? Perhaps our prejudices, our unwillingness to help, envy, material goods, hatred, unwillingness to forgive, or even something else?

God wants us to have relationships that are more than mediocre. Relationships take time and require compassion, wisdom, empathy, kindness, courtesy and forgiveness. When we love one another, we act as God’s hands and feet to those that he puts in our lives. It does take time and effort to be a friend, a brother or sister, but the blessings far outweigh the costs. Ben spent his life loving and serving the community and the people of God.

Loving others as God loved us is the heart of our discipleship. Religious life can only exist through human relationships, especially when they are based on mutual respect and love.

When we love one another, we fulfill the second of Jesus’ two Great Commandments. Friends are with us in good times and bad times just like Jesus is. They help us to expand our world, expose us to new and creative possibilities, and sustain us when we are in need.

God chose Brother Ben for the purpose of love and service. God has chosen all of us for the purpose of bearing much eternal fruit in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and compassion. These characteristics grew within Brother Ben his whole life and now it is time for us to say: Well done good and faithful servant. Come enter my Father’s house. Rest now in peace Brother Ben. Amen.