

Homily for Joe Doscher, SCJ

Before I begin the short reflection I have prepared I want us to pause and unite ourselves in spirit and prayer with Joe's two sisters (Lorraine and Carol) and his niece Carolynn who could not be with us. His brother Fred has preceded Joe to God's loving embrace. Joe was always very close to his family and when he lived near them he would spend as much time with them as he could. We want them to know that we are with them and they with us as we gather.

I don't know if Joe was more of a scriptural scholar than I ever knew or if he was just guided lovingly by God's Spirit in his choice of Psalm 145 to be used in the liturgy celebrating his life. I smiled as I read a footnote giving a bit of a commentary on this psalm. It said: Psalm 145 "a hymn in acrostic form, (meaning that) every verse begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Acrostic poems usually do not **develop** ideas but consist rather of loosely connected statements. The singer (in this case, Joe) invites all to praise God. The works of God (described in the psalm) make God present and invite human praise." By choosing a psalm that praises God from A to Z (really aleph to tau in the Hebrew alphabet), it is as if Joe is telling us that God was with him from beginning to end and he wants us to know that he knew it and he wants us to join him in offering praise and thanks to God.

I thought to myself: that is so like Joe. He doesn't want me or anyone to give a theological discourse at his funeral. He just wants us to look at his life, and ours for that matter, and reflect on the ordinary events of our lives and the people who are with us and to realize how God is present in and through them, blessing us all along the way, and to respond by giving praise and thanks to our gracious, loving God.

The psalm says: "The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in love. The Lord is good to all, compassionate to every creature." (especially, cats, the psalm doesn't actually say that. I added that because of Joe's fondness for feline critters. He had them all over his room at the Congregation Home.) But where Joe really experienced God's graciousness and mercy and goodness and compassion was through all those persons who sustained him especially in his later years. Joe always spoke of his gratitude to our Congregation, the Priests of the Sacred Heart, for making sure that he was so well taken care of. When I would visit him he would gesture around his room and comment on how good he had it. He appreciated the nurses and staff who were a part of his daily life at the Congregation Home, even when he would be having a bad day and did not want to take his medications. They genuinely liked him and he enjoyed them. Visits from us his confreres always meant a lot to him, especially those who were able to make more regular visits and bring Eucharist to him. But he had a special place in his heart for June Rios who was a particularly loving presence in his life. It was evident in the way she cared for him. She was like a grand-daughter to him, although when she took him out to get some fresh air or for a movie or a meal at a restaurant he liked to tell people she was his "girl-friend." These were all ordinary events, but they touched Joe's heart. He saw all of these people as signs of God's loving care for him and he was grateful! Often we men have trouble expressing our affection. Joe did not. He spoke of his affection for people. He expressed it to them directly and told others about it. At times Joe did not have the words to express the love that was in

his heart so the love he wanted to express flowed out in tears which he did not fight or hide.

There is one verse in the psalm that I believe Joe would have edited. As written it reads: "The eyes of all look hopefully to you; you give them their food in due season." I think he would have had the psalm read "...you give them their food AND DRINK in due season." Joe thoroughly enjoyed having a glass of Merlot with his evening meal. The only thing that could have made it better would have been having a cigarette with it. But that was on the list of forbidden fruits.

I was talking with Johnny Klingler about Joe and he said Joe was ready to die, ready to meet his loving God. Joe knew he was not perfect. He had his faults and shortcomings, but he believed in a God who, as his psalm says: "...supports all who are falling and raises up all who are bowed down.... (and) who watches over all who love (God)..." Joe was/is a Priest of the Heart of Jesus and that is the kind of God he came to know and love, the God to whom he commends himself, and the God he wants us to honor and praise with him as we celebrate Joe's life.

Those are the kinds of things I felt Joe wanted us to have in our minds and hearts as we gathered for his funeral and that is why he requested that Psalm 145 be proclaimed on this occasion. That is the homily that Joe has given to us, but I added something.

We always have a gospel reading when we gather for liturgy and since Joe did not choose one for us, I selected the passage from Luke's gospel that spoke of the exchange between Jesus and the good thief. I could imagine Joe speaking to Jesus just as the man whom tradition calls Dismas did, as they both hung side by side on their crosses. Joe was a humble man and could admit his faults. I could see him confronting someone who would not take responsibility for their life. Joe could recognize sin in his life and own his own sinfulness and accept the consequences of his actions. But he also knew the Heart of Jesus and Jesus' goodness and love and he honored Him. Joe was profoundly aware of the shortcomings in his life compared to that of Jesus and he would humbly entrust himself to the merciful, loving Jesus that he knows and loves and just ask Jesus to remember him, to put in a good word for him, as it were, with Abba, our gracious God.

So, as we pray for our brother Joe, bound together as we are in the communion of saints, we unite ourselves to the petition of the good thief on Joe's behalf. Joe, we want to assure you that we do remember you and we pray that Jesus remember you and take you to Himself. And, Joe, we ask that you remember us too in the presence of our loving God.

- Fr. John Czyzynski, SCJ