

BRO. DAN SHARPE

*Reflections of Father John A. Leies, S.M. at Mass of the Resurrection,
July 26, 2007, Marianist Residence Chapel, St. Mary's University*

This past Monday, God called Bro. Dan Sharpe to Himself. After these last weeks of slowly losing ground to the forces of physical debilitation, Dan went home. And the St. Louis Province novitiate class of 1941 now is reduced to four: Brothers James McCaffrey, Paul Goelz, Herbert Janson, and Charles Cummiskey, all here present.

Dan was from Chicago—a special grace and benefit for anyone! He went to St. Michael's High School—another special grace and benefit for anyone! It was as a student at St. Michael's that Dan met the Brothers of Mary—and came to admire and respect them. God lures us to Himself in various ways. For Dan, the attraction was teaching. As he once wrote: "I didn't come to the Marianists in order to be a religious. I came because I thought I could be a teacher. To be a Brother was the means to being a teacher." But Dan admitted many times that his motivation was transformed and deepened as he went through the formation programs of the Society.

Dan's first regular teaching assignment was to Central Catholic High School here in San Antonio. And then in 1947 he was sent to Don Bosco High School, Milwaukee. That is where I first lived with Dan, from 1948-1952. Those were good days. Dan and I in later years often reminisced about them. Three days before his death at the end of one of my visits to Dan, I left him with the traditional school greeting: "Bosco forever," to which he answered feebly but with fervor, "Bosco forever."

Our paths crossed again later after I was ordained and went back to Don Bosco High School as chaplain in 1959 where Dan was now principal. And then we were together here at St. Mary's University, at the Marianist Residence, where Dan became director and then vice-president for student affairs at the university. In 1979, Dan was appointed assistant provincial for the St. Louis Province.

Dan was a strong believer in education and the value of schools. He was convinced of the incalculable value of an education for a young man (or woman); it was the way for the poor to rise out of poverty, the way for society to have discerning citizens, the means of strengthening the Church by forming students according to the Gospel message.

Fr. John Manahan mentioned last night at the wake service that Dan seemed to him to be a reflective person, a cerebral person. Dan was that and he put many of his thoughts to the St. Louis Province every month over a two year period when he was assistant provincial. Since there was no Marianist in the Province with the name of "Archibald," he said, the name "Arch" would be the symbolic name for all the monks. Father Fleming referred to these letters as "circulars addressed in a folksy style to Province members, catching the mood and the challenges of the 1980s."

In those letters to the Province, Dan wrote on a variety of topics: growing old, change, poverty, teaching, conflict, prayer, even on altar rails and on smoking. In one of those letters, Dan spoke about the teacher. "Being a teacher is being an artist," he wrote. To be a good teacher, one has to have "mastery of the subject matter, skill in communication, enthusiasm for the subject, and a caring for the student." He was right.

I might mention that if you re-read the "Dear Arch" letters, you come across some interesting observations of Dan. For example:

"Some religious are *difficult* to live with; very few are *impossible* to live with."
"God didn't give us life to serve our own desires."
"Consider long life as a gift."
"Live long and you get to attend a lot of funerals."

Dan had a love for Mexico. He spent a summer in that country while he was studying for his master's degree in Spanish. Later he took groups of St. Mary's students spelunking in Mexico and wrote to the Provincial after one outing: "It would be a poor religious indeed who forgot his relations with God while living in close contact with God's creation—His lush tropical countryside, His mammoth caves, His essentially Catholic people of Mexico."

During the time he was assistant provincial, the Society of Mary went back to Mexico. And he opened a new chapter in his life in the 1980s when he volunteered to live and work in Mexico—in Apaseo and Queretaro. As Fr. Dave Fleming mentioned: "Dan was a grandfather figure and mentor for the young Mexican candidates." I don't think Dan ever gave up the hope of returning to Mexico to work—until the last few weeks of his life.

On Monday of this week, after he heard of Dan's death, Father Fleming sent a letter with reflections of his working with Dan when they were in the Provincial office. Here is part of his tribute:

"For eight years in the Provincial Administration, Dan and I work closely together in St. Louis ... Dan was an independent, sometimes whimsical thinker, with original ideas ... He was a good example of 'thinking outside the box' ... He was the champion of the underdog, the poor, and the ordinary little people ... Dan had a deep love and conviction about the importance of education. In his own somewhat unorthodox way, he was champion of the primary means of fulfilling our mission ... Though never demonstrative, Dan was a deeply religious man. He had deep convictions about the importance of faith, of God and Mary and our mission."

Last evening at the wake service, several people spoke of admiring in Dan the fact that he was a "good Brother," a caring person. When he was assistant provincial he wrote a personal letter to every member of the Province on his birthday. Throughout his life, Dan liked to talk to passers-by, whether on the footsteps of Don Bosco High School, or in front of the Provincial House in St. Louis, or here in the quadrangle of the University. I remember how in the past year or two when I would take lunch with Dan, he would always end with "May the Lord bless your afternoon."

The Scriptural readings of today remind us of the faith of Dan. Jesus was truly for him "the way, the truth, and the light." And he knew the peace of heart that only the Lord gives. On this past Monday, he went into the presence of Our Lord and His Mother. In the words of the first Scriptural passage we read today we can say: *Dan is in the hands of God, no torment shall touch him now. God found him worthy of himself.*