

**Homily**  
**Funeral for Fr. Don Bracht, SM**  
**September 22, 2007**

Before commenting on the Word of God we have just heard I want to share with you two quotations that came to mind when I learned that Father Don died. The first is a refrain we said often in the former Province of the Pacific:

*"There are no more legends in the Province!"*

Happily that popular saying was never correct. I have witnessed the burial of many great men we could rightly call legends. Today we are witnessing the passing of another legend – on his birthday!

The second quotation is one I learned years ago at a jubilee celebration. On the souvenir card for the occasion were the words – and this is a free translation:

*"That person is surely rich, for whom each day is a perpetual discovery."*

For me that describes Don's rich life. He had a wonderful sense of wonder. For him each day was an opportunity to make a new discovery.

As a member of the former Province of the Pacific I was invited to be the homilist for this Mass. For the record, however, both Father Don and I began our life in the Society of Mary as members of the former Province of Cincinnati. My reflections this morning, however, are based on our years together in Hawaii and California. I came to know Don well in Honolulu in the early days of what is now Chaminade University.

Together we worked hard to move from a two year college for men to a four year co-ed college. Don's great enthusiasm carried us through some dark days. Our friendship dates back to that era well over fifty years ago. Years later we again lived together in Cupertino where even as a senior Marianist Don never lost his sense of wonder and enthusiasm.

Some time ago when Don seemed near death, Father Bob Backherms began preparations for his funeral by selecting readings for the Mass. Father Tom Schroer forwarded them to me earlier this week as suggestions. When Brother Joe Mariscalco and I visited Father Bob Wednesday evening, I was delighted to find him alert and able to converse, although with difficulty. He was pleased to know that I intended to use these readings and repeated what Father Tom had said: that I was free to choose other readings. I thanked him for selecting the readings and assured him that I was very happy to have them because I thought they spoke eloquently about the meaning of death while at the same time reminding us of some of the features of Don's life.

The reading from the Book of Wisdom is a wonderful proclamation of our faith that for the faithful, life is changed, not ended by death.

*The souls of the just are in the hand of God, and no torment shall touch them.  
... they are in peace.*

We can see in these words from the Old Testament a foretelling of Christ's great proclamation of eternal life. Death is not the end of life – rather, it is the beginning of new life. Death is the first day of the rest of our life. Life is changed, not ended, by death.

The long and memorable first phase of Don's life has ended; he is now in the hands of God as he begins the rest of his life – a life free from torment – as he awakes from his long sleep of the past months to begin a new life where every moment is a new discovery of God's great love for him.

The faithful departed will live with God forever because God tried them and found them worthy of himself. *As gold in the furnace, he proved them, and as sacrificial offerings he took them to himself.* In Don's last months he waited more or less patiently as *a sacrificial offering*. But his whole life was a joyful sacrifice as he gave himself cheerfully for others.

Don was what we call a "people person." He related well to others as teacher, principal, counselor – above all, as he loved to call himself as we were known in California, "A Brother of Mary." The author of the Book of Wisdom says that people like Don would shine and *dart about as sparks through stubble*. And anyone who ever drove with Don at the wheel through the streets of San Francisco understands why these words describe Don's driving – in his prime. I told him he would be very much at home in Rome!

Our second reading from the Book of Revelation is short and to the point:

*Happy are those who die in the Lord!  
Happy indeed, the Spirit says; now they can rest for ever after their work,  
since their good deeds go with them.*

One of the great gifts of my life was my assignment to Villa Saint Joseph in Cupertino where I lived with Don and other legends of the Province of the Pacific. I had known all of them in their prime and I enjoyed living with them in their time of rest after their work, since *their good deeds went with them!*

I remember Don as indefatigable. He loved to teach and preach and he did both vigorously, although those who had him in class said he was "a bear in the classroom." Others commented that he was famous – or infamous – for giving triple homilies: one to introduce the Mass, one before the readings, one after...

Don built the Marianist Mission in the Province of the Pacific from the ground up, made

friends everywhere, followed the alumni all over California, and somehow found time – made time – to visit and phone and write. He was very present to others and they to him. He can now rest, since his *good deeds* do indeed *go after him*.

The short excerpt from John's gospel we heard this morning is a remarkable description of the last months of Don's life.

Saint John tells us that Jesus knew *that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father*. And then John records Christ's prayer. About to leave this world, his great request was that his disciples might all be one.

In his last days, Father Don certainly prayed after the example of Jesus. Father Don undoubtedly prayed for himself and for all those whose lives he touched near and far. One of our mutual friends, a sister of Brother Maurice Miller, almost as old as Father Don, was always amazed and delighted when she received a handwritten note from Father Don assuring her that he remembered her well.

I was always personally encouraged as Father Don followed the work of the unification of the provinces with great interest.

In our struggles to become one province with great expectations, we are certainly supported by the prayers of our senior Marianists – like Father Don – asking God to give us all light and strength to move forward that we, too, will make of our lives, continual discoveries.

**Stephen Tutas, SM**

**Mount Saint John, Dayton, 09-22-2007**