

HOMILY FOR MSGR. GRIMES

We gather not so much to mourn the death of Msgr. Grimes, but to rejoice in the gift of faith that was well lived from one who served the Church as pastor of Our Lady of Peace for 20 years; as pastor of St. Agatha for 10 years; as principal of Bishop Watterson for 5 years; as principal of Portsmouth Notre Dame High School for 5 years; as well as served as Associate Pastor at OLP and Newark St. Francis. Lastly, the parish community of St. Andrew was very blessed with his vibrant presence for the past five years. To Colby and Sue, and nephews and nieces, and relatives and friends, including Bishop Donnelly and his seminarian classmates we extend our prayers and sympathy, but also the hope of the power of the resurrection which Msgr. proclaimed loudly.

Eight years ago when his nephew, Msgr. Colby Grimes, passed away, Fr. Tom Petry offered the homily and waxed eloquent for 30 minutes. Shortly afterward Msgr. approached me and said, “When I die, you’re preaching (pause) – seven minutes”. It was his typical style; decisive, concise; yet throwing a change up at the end that would leave you reeling on your heels and rolling in laughter. I can’t speak a mile a minute like the Fed-ex guy of the past, nor do I want to be like Forrest Gump; but, sorry, Coach, I can’t run that play, and am going to have to call an audible. Though we are similar in many ways we differ in styles. His strength was preparation and execution; while I prefer to wait and fill in the details at the last minute. He referred to me as last-minute Mike, which I don’t think was a term of endearment.

The Gospel proclaimed is a central theme of life as Christians. “Unless the grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat. But, if it dies it will produce much fruit.” It means letting go of oneself; desires, ambitions, selfishness, and sinfulness, and allowing the seed of faith that has been planted within, to be imbedded and emerge, and produce fruit of virtue and good works. It imitates the way and life of Christ, who came to serve and not be served. He came down from heaven, was conceived in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit and became incarnate. Through his redemptive life and love he brings us a life that can not be extinguished, and rises above the powers of darkness, evil, and fear that is omnipresent. This process of dying and rising with the Lord extends throughout life in a daily journey until one resides in the fullness of God, when the body that lies in death is called to everlasting glory on the last day. Perhaps this theme of dying and rising is more pronounced in the life of a man called to be a priest; as there is an active dying of self; albeit dreams of a career, of marriage and children; and follow a call that conforms one to share in the ministerial priesthood of Jesus Christ. There is a need for discernment to recognize that call and head in that direction.

For Msgr. Grimes that capacity for discernment occurred early in life; as he was blessed by a family that was rooted in the Catholic faith. They knew, understood, and practiced the faith. Yes, they were ‘Catholic as hell’, one of his colorful descriptions which he often invoked in regard to members of his flock. His mother was of the Ryan clan, and his father converted after they were married by a priest who played a significant role in the family, Fr. Raymond Bauschard. The Grimes family was at IC and Father Bauschard was at nearby Holy Name. In 1929 Fr. Bauschard became the founding pastor of St. Mary Magdalene, and within a few years thereafter the family headed out west. Msgr. Grimes often used the term “My man” that

described the affiliation and bond with someone that he had hope and confidence in, such as my man Gus (Fr. Gus Winkler), my man Vern (House Speaker Vern Riffe), or my man John (Durant, his hand picked successor at Watterson). Fr. Bauschard and his own father probably originated that phrase but it also included his older brothers Dan and Colby.

Msgr. benefited from Catholic education at St. Mary Magdalene, and especially at St. Charles. Last year he was the recipient of the distinguished Borromeo award. He spoke about his experience at St. Charles and mentioned two members of the faculty who played an instrumental role in shaping his life; Msgr. George Woltz, the greatest scripture scholar of our diocese (sorry, Buzz), and Jack Ryan, one of the greatest coaches ever in Ohio high school sports. Msgr. Woltz was brilliant, yet could bring his material down to earth in a clear and organized manner, where the sheep could graze. Coach Ryan was as down to earth as you could get. He could humble as well as humor his players. But if he brought you down he would also raise you up, because he cared deeply about his players. Msgr. Grimes learned from and imitated these masters to a 't'.

At the end of high school he had options for the future. He could have been a great teacher and coach like his mentors. He exhibited leadership skills that would serve him well in business. He had athletic ability and was emerging as a top flite pitcher who could bring the heat, and had scouts on his trail. And he was becoming a strapping handsome young man who was getting the looks. As a young ordained priest he was a prototype of a 'Fr. What-a-waste'. Cia McQuade and the freshman girls who had him for religion could vouch for that. He was geared for success in the world, yet that's not what happened.

Last week I had the opportunity to visit the churches of St. Francis in Assisi, Italy. In the upper church there is a fresco titled, "Holy Obedience". In that fresco there is an image of St. Francis (which is Msgr.'s middle name) kneeling in front of a seated angel. With his one hand the angel is motioning Francis to be silent, as he has a finger over his lips. In the other hand the angel is placing a yoke over the head of Francis, a sign to be bound to God. In Monsignor's life there was inner movement; a movement to be quiet and listen (which is the root of obedience), and a movement to be yoked more dearly to God. It was not a sudden, dramatic experience, but one in which the awareness of the Holy Spirit moving him would become a part and package of his way of being that led him to continue studies at St. Charles and prepare for priestly formation. Perhaps the best description of this movement was the phrase he used, "fire in the belly". It became the source of his drive and motivation, to exercise with confidence and authority the gifts that were given to him by God.

Underneath the main image of Holy Obedience there are two other images, titled Prudence and Humility. Last year at the Annual Catholic Virtues dinner benefitting Catholic education he was the recipient of the Prudence award. Throughout his career as priest, principal, and pastor he demonstrated right judgment. I, myself, benefitted many times from his virtue. One of the secret ingredients that he incorporated in exercising this virtue was what he termed horse-sense. It was a combination of not deviating from truth and incorporating practical wisdom to bring matters to resolution.

With respect to humility, Msgr. could laugh at himself and his own imperfections. He would refer to himself as the world's worst speller and the world's worst putter. With respect to the latter he would compensate by expanding the 'gimmee' range from within the leather of the putter to the length of the putter- and beyond. As principal of teenagers his humble spirit remembered his own struggles as a teenager. Though he could come down on you like a ton of bricks, he would also, like Jack Ryan, show mercy and bring you up, knowing that you could better (right, Bud?). For me his example of humility was being a man of prayer. Whether walking by his room seeing him praying the divine office or walking in church and seeing him quietly meditating, or even during vacation time. For the past number of years Mike Baumann would graciously allow us, along with Bishop Donnelly, to use his condo in Florida. It was Mike who helped solve a mystery in Msgr's. life that had been unresolved for 45 years, but that's a story that can be told later today. His condo has two bedrooms, and of course, we would always defer to the bishop to have the master bedroom, and we would have the other room, which was half the size. Before going to bed he would always be out of his bed, on his knees, praying and concluding with the act of contrition; imploring God's mercy and forgiveness.

It was this theme of holy obedience, of listening and yielding to God, which was also the fuel that put fire in his belly. There was a deep sense that the Holy Spirit was in charge. It propelled him to accept the challenges that came to him not with hesitation or timidity, but with a can-do confidence. You knew that he was driving the bus and all was well. He taught with conviction, 'you better believe it, baby', especially on the real presence of the Eucharist.

There was a youthfulness about his demeanor that connected with the young; who experienced him as a father, grandfather, mentor, and friend. For you guys, if he called you a donkey, you were in with him, and he cared deeply about you. With the girls he would be more polite, and address you as 'beautiful lady', or if he didn't remember your name he would give you one like Penelope or Myrtle.

His sphere of influence extended far beyond the Catholic community as he was a well recognized figure, both in the political arena and the sports arena. He served as chaplain for the Ohio House of Representatives for 22 years through his alignment with Vern Riffe. Sports played a significant part of his life, both as a participant as well as a fan. He had a major league arm, which deferred to the priesthood; and enjoyed catching games at the grade school, high, school and college level. While at home he had a double decker TV arrangement to catch twice the viewing action, and hopefully, escape commercials.

At the time I learned of his death I was preparing to enter the bowels of the earth; the sacred burial place of the catacombs outside the city of Rome. It was the place in which the faithful Christian community gathered to bury the dead; especially their heroes who gave their lives for Christ and his Church. It was a place to pray for them and offer masses for them on altars constructed above their tombs. It was a place to seek the prayers of the dead to imitate their witness, and to ultimately join up with them. It was a place of great hope that through the power of the death and resurrection of Christ they would be raised to the eternal city of God. Msgr. Grimes preached this hope with vigor, especially at funerals. Don't mourn for the dead, he would say, they have it made. They are free from their ailments and imperfections. Life is great!

A couple of weeks ago he mentioned that he no longer had the fire in his belly. The things of this world no longer held his interest. When he moved into Mother Angeline McCrory he did not want a second TV in his room. He didn't even watch the OSU/ Nebraska game. The spirit that was leaving him was calling him to a new ballpark. It didn't come as a surprise as what he had been living and proclaiming was now being realized. Being a man of preparation and organization he had already cashed his chips in and his bags were packed. Being a man who never mastered the virtue of patience, he didn't want to linger, but head for home. He was ready to sign off. Paraphrasing Joe Nuxhall, the longtime Reds broadcaster with his familiar signoff phrase, "Here is the old right hander rounding third and heading for his eternal home".

We bid farewell to our brother; our uncle; our father who served as priest, teacher and shepherd; our mentor, and our friend. Well done, good and faithful servant.