

Bishop Flanagan Homily

I am sure we come together with many different thoughts and emotions. Today, as we gather to celebrate these rites for our brother, Bishop Flanagan, we have many different feelings. We feel joy at having known a man so kind, so generous, and so giving that he has been a true example of what it means to live a Christian life! We feel the pain of his absence as he has departed from us, because we have loved him, and we know he has loved us! We feel hope because he is in the hands of God the Father's grace, and we look forward to sharing that life of grace in heaven with Bishop Tom, especially on the day of the resurrection!

No one was more surprised at having been called to be a bishop than Father Tom Flanagan. It was truly an act of obedience for him to accept the calling. But his fellow priests were not surprised at all! He was known among them as a priests' priest -- meaning that he truly lived out the meaning of sacrifice, availability, and dedication called forth by the gift of ordination. Other priests sought him out for his spiritual guidance, and they trusted his word because they knew that he was sincere. And so when he was named an Auxiliary Bishop for San Antonio to assist Archbishop Flores, there was a feeling of real joy among his brother priests.

Through his years of service in many parishes he grew close to the lay people of the Archdiocese. He helped to support the Knights of Columbus as their long-time chaplain. He helped to found the Charismatic Center for the Archdiocese by offering guidance and shape to the spirit of renewal in the Church. Tom spent so many nights and weekends hearing confessions on retreats until the late hours of the night, seeming to never tire of being with God's People.

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He saw the lay people as true partners in the life and mission of the Church. In this sense he embodied the real spirit of the Second Vatican Council's vision of the Church as a pilgrim people, journeying into the life of Christ together. In this way, Bishop Tom made the famous saying of St. Augustine something very real. "With you I am a Christian; for you I am a bishop." Tom Flanagan was truly with us and for us!

In today's reading from the Gospel of John, Jesus says that he came not to do his own will, but the will of the one who sent him. This is the spirit of true obedience. Not to impose one's self and one's own ideas and ways, but rather to do the will of God, our Father. Tom felt the call not only to the priesthood, but to offer himself to come to San Antonio, Texas, as a missionary priest. He was ordained to serve in a place he had not seen, and to work among a people he had never met. San Antonio would prove to be a far away place from his green and gentle Ireland, and show itself to be a place of hard-scrabble farms and ranches, a land rich in its Catholic roots, but very divided in its ethnic and racial realities. It would take some getting used to! But Tom's obedience to the call of the Holy Spirit was such that there was no turning back for him. No turning away from this challenge of helping the Church to grow, expand, and deepen its holiness as God's People in this place.

You see, Tom believed that his life was not his own, but rather, that it belonged to God, and that God has great plans for the human person. "If we live, we live for the Lord," as St. Paul told the Romans. "And if we die, we die for the Lord." Why? Because God has a great destiny for us! God has a great destiny for every human person,

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whether he or she be rich or poor, sick or well, important in the eyes of the world or not. That destiny is expressed in St. John's great vision expressed in the Book of Revelation. Our destiny is the New Jerusalem, as the bride of Christ, descending from the heavens where God dwells with the human race, where every tear is dried, where there is no more death or mourning, and where the old order has passed away, where Christ is the Alpha and the Omega. It was this vision that inspired Tom Flanagan, a country boy from Ireland who became a successor to the Apostles in a far-away land called Texas!

So, while we feel the natural human sting of grief at his passing from us, yet we are filled with joy for our brother Tom, who wears the crown of victory in Christ! And, we are inspired by hope! Hope that we too will share the blessings of heaven! Hope that the Church will truly live up to her calling to be God's holy People! Hope that the kindness and selfless service Bishop Tom embodied is something that we can imitate! Hope that we will be as obedient to the One who sends us as was Bishop Tom.

As we celebrate Bishop Tom's funeral we are surrounded by the signs of his incorporation into Christ through his baptism (the holy water, the paschal candle, the white garments), and his ordination as priest and bishop (his vestments). Most especially we gather around our brother in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, the foretaste of the promise of the life to come. Let this Eucharist renew our hearts. Let this Eucharist make our hearts obedient to the One who sends us!