

**Homily – Funeral Mass for Fr. Leonard James Brown, CMF  
Immaculate Heart of Mary Catholic Church – 09/20/21**

As opposed to wishing or simply desiring, hoping transforms and configures one's life. That was the obvious case in Fr. Len's life. He devoted it to the mission of Christ through the inner life of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, shaping it as God's tool for the service of his People. His ministry in MACC, as its Vice President and Director of Diaconal Studies, in Campus Ministry, and Formation; his instrumental collaboration helping to lead our archdiocesan diaconate program – one of the largest in the country – in addition to the multiple responsibilities he undertook throughout his religious life, including his service as Provincial Superior, Pastor, member of the General Council on the Economy, Prefect of Spirituality on the Provincial Council, his roles in college Campus Ministry and as a teacher, among others, are testament to his relentless hope. He was – and remains – a missionary of hope.

Eternal life is not a wish; it is our firmly rooted hope. It is not a self-centered longing, but one that constantly strives to be self-less for the sake of the life that the Holy Spirit gives to the world. "Christ died for our sins," calling us to join in his sacrifice, dying to self for the greater glory of God through the service of his People. Death is gain. (Cf. Phil 1:21).

Today we celebrate our brother Len's life in the same hope that he witnessed during his life and particularly throughout his decades of ministry. His legacy is a testament to the depths of our existence. There is something in us that does not conform to the mortal, temporary and limited condition that the evanescent present provides us. As he loved, he did not build for death; as he dreamt or planned for the future, he did not build for death. Death surprised him along the way and he had to hand over his unfinished achievements, because they were meant to continue communicating the life that we hope he now enjoys. His sisters, Darlene and Glirma, and brothers, Leigh and Frank, as well as his brother Claretians, presently suffer his loss, but the Church is here with them to offer the consolation of the Holy Spirit.

A deep hope beats inside us to live forever; although, at times, it remains camouflaged behind a tremendous urge to hurry and enjoy the

present. Today we bring in our souls the anxiety and pain of those who stumble before the wall of death, but which cannot extinguish the hope in a Life that is written with capital letters and whose longing we experience in many ways. As Pope Francis has said: *“We can and must hope, because God is faithful. He did not abandon us; he visited us and entered into our situations of pain, anguish and death. His light dispelled the darkness of the tomb: today he wants that light to penetrate even to the darkest corners of our lives. Dear sister, dear brother, even if in your heart you have buried hope, do not give up: God is greater. Darkness and death do not have the last word. Be strong, for with God nothing is lost!”* Death does not have the last word because God is God. Father Len dedicated his life to the Living God, so we can only begin to imagine for him a life that is far beyond our imagination and expectations.

The Son of God, who came into this world to die for our sins, was raised on the third day. We are saved through the Good News of God’s Word Incarnate through Mary, to whom our brother dedicated his life. The Gospel speaks to us of life, because it cannot be otherwise. To look at the God of Jesus Christ is to see the God of life, with the confidence that our people are called to live in him and with the hope of finding full life in him.

But the Word we have heard also rests on eating the flesh of the Son of Man and drinking his blood, that so many times took the form of bread and wine through the hands of our brother. The Lord’s flesh is the life of the world and the hope that everything that afflicts us has an ultimate purpose in God’s life. The one who feeds on that flesh and blood will have life because of Him. He “is the bread that came down from heaven. ... whoever eats this bread will live forever. ... It is the spirit that gives life, while the flesh is of no avail.”

The Lord is our shepherd; we lack nothing. In green pastures he makes us lie down; to still waters he leads us; he restores our souls. Together with our brother, we will dwell in the house of the Lord for endless days. May God give him eternal life and give us the strength to never stop nourishing ourselves with the food that leads to eternity. And may the Mother of God – through whom Len followed the hope of eternal life to the end – also lead us to her Son.