

**MEMORIAL MASS FOR
REVEREND FRANCIS G. MORRISEY, O.M.I.**

L'Église Sacré-Coeur
Ottawa, Ontario
Saturday, 16 October 2021, 10:00 A.M.

Introductory Remarks at the Mass

According to Jesus (and St Paul), “in the day” there were Pharisees and other religious leaders who could take a lesson from Father Frank Morrissey. These others tended to see the Law as the means to salvation, but ironically they made it a stumbling block – for themselves and others.

Of course, Jesus and Paul are speaking about the Mosaic Law, which God gave to his chosen people as a means to holiness. That Law was powerless. It was external law, and people need an internal power which that Law cannot give. So, the Father and the risen Jesus give us the Holy Spirit.

But, we still have the Law – but a new kind of law!

Jesus introduces a new Law: the Law of Love: to love God and the neighbor. All is reduced to this Law, and all is fulfilled in it. Every other “law” among us must reflect that law ... including, of course, canon law. Otherwise, these derivative laws are “invalid.”

Frank could teach these religious leaders “in the day,” as he always taught us, this truth...

Frank Morrissey lived his life in service to that Law. We who knew him realized that, as he grew in age and wisdom, Frank’s love for God became more intense. As that love grew, Frank was increasingly able to see what God sees, and to feel what God feels (as it were). This love of God found concrete expression in Frank’s passion to love others by sharing a tremendous gift which God gave him: the gift of serving the new Law of Love as a church lawyer, a canon lawyer.

Our Faculty of Canon Law is right now compiling a special annual volume of our canon law journal (*Studia canonica* – which Frank personally founded 55 years ago) in order to honor Frank. It is entitled:

A BURNING ZEAL FOR THE SALVATION OF SOULS

Its sub-caption :

“Whoever wishes to become one of us must have an ardent desire for his own perfection, and be enflamed with the love for our lord Jesus Christ and his church and a burning zeal for the salvation of souls.”
(*St. Eugene DeMazenod, 1853*)

This also reflects the very last words of the existing *Code of Canon Law*: “the supreme law of the Church is the salvation of souls (the *salus animarum*).” This is, indeed, the Law of Love.

We who knew Frank in any way, even casually, can attest that Frank was committed to this supreme Law. And, he used his talent as a very exceptionally gifted canon lawyer to bring this *salus animarum* to others.

Frank was tireless in promoting a right understanding of the pastoral purpose of canon law in countless ways. As I mentioned, he alone founded *Studia canonica* – Canada’s only canon law journal (remarkably well respected and received throughout the world). He also was one of four canonists who labored to found the Canadian Canon Law Society in the mid-1960’s. He enjoyed travelling the world to assist various groups (canon law societies, bishops’ conferences, religious institutes, Vatican congregations, so many others) to understand the law rightly, and to apply it with justice, equity, and compassion.

He has a special love for training new canonists, having been served the SPU Faculty of Canon Law for decades as lecturer, dean, and professor. Even after his “official retirement,” Frank was very willing (“thrilled”) to offer courses. Anne Asselin and I (on behalf of all the professors) regularly asked him to teach a course or two every year – and for two reasons: (1) We wanted students to gain his wisdom, but (2) more importantly: we wanted students to know the Man who modeled the meaning of generous service in the ministry of canon law, and its pastoral application. To know the message and the messenger!

The litany of Frank’s public contributions to weaving the pastoral purpose of canon law into the life of the Church, pales in comparison with his efforts to do the same to help communities and individuals. A close friend of his (and of mine)

reflected on Frank's passion to use his talent as a learned scholar of the new Law (that is, the Law of Love – as well as the canon law which brings freedom, right relationships, and justice to the pilgrim People of God):

So many times when I was visiting him, I was struck by the number of phone calls and emails he would receive from only God-knows-where, bringing him questions, requests for help, or challenging situations. They came from religious communities, priests, bishops, dioceses, and, yes, even from the Vatican. Frank, being the person he was, responded to each and every one with the same gentle and respectful manner, always working to find a just, charitable and faith-filled response; often so creatively within the bounds of the Law. It wasn't only clergy and religious who sought out Frank and his expertise. Many lay persons came to him with their struggles, questions or concerns. And they, too, experienced the same quiet welcome, acceptance and discretion in the way he would help them, always guided by his vision of being of service to the grass roots of the Church. That was Frank.

Many of us will recall that Frank was the 2019 recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award of the Catholic Health Association of the United States. In response to this award, Frank composed a text entitled "A Letter to My Younger Self." It is available as a text and also as a video on the Internet. Google it. I had hoped to read the text, but was firmly reminded that "everyone already heard it." So, reluctantly, I received that *wise* "obedience."

Yet, I find the text of Frank's "Letter" to be very inspiring. Every time I hear/read it, I hear a new message and receive a new inspiration. So, I *must* recall today at least Frank's closing remarks which summarize so much of Frank's canonical ministry – words which, if I may, are his lasting legacy to canonists and so many others:

Your priestly ministry is joy filled. You use your Canon Law skills to assist people, especially those who no one else can help.

You'll come to understand a few things:

First, don't bother starting with the statement, "You cannot do this or that. It is against Canon Law!!!"

A second point, develop and keep a sense of humor.

Thirdly, as the last words of the Code of Canon Law sum it all up: “the supreme law is the salvation of souls.”

Fourthly, Do. Not. Be. Afraid. There is a tomorrow, although we have no idea what it will hold. Do your utmost to be involved in shaping tomorrow – which will soon be here.

Frank, we hear you. We get it! We hear your invitation to listen compassionately, to be good-humored, to work for the *salus animarum*, and to trust in a new tomorrow.

Even as we remember you most fondly, we entrust you to “new and eternal tomorrow” of God’s kingdom.

Requiescas in pace. Amen!

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