

## **Memorial Mass for Fr Francis Morrisey October 16, 2021**

### **Eulogy offered by Mr. James Morrisey, Father Morrisey's brother**

Good morning everyone, Bonjour à tous

I am Jim Morrisey, Frank's youngest brother, and, on behalf of my entire family, I welcome you to this celebration of the life of Francis Morrisey.

I am really pleased to have been asked to speak today at Frank's event. This is my opportunity for revenge. At Marie and my wedding, 45 years ago, Frank was the officiant. He had prepared a homily that recounted his joy of watching me grown up, become successful and find a beautiful bride. So after reading the Gospel it was time to read his speech. He began fumbling through his pockets looking for his text. After a few seconds of searching his face turned red and he said "I am sorry I forgot to bring my homily so let's say together the Apostles Creed". So what shall I do today?

Frank, as he was better known, was a highly respected member of two accomplished families, The Oblates of Mary Immaculate and the Morrisey family. I will speak today about Frank from the perspective of his birth family.

Frank was born in Charlottetown PEI in 1936, the birth province of our parents and grandparents. Frank was the first of our parents' 5 children. Our sister Joan arrived shortly after Frank was born (sometimes referred to as Irish twins). Three more boys followed. While he may have been first born he would soon learn that he faced stiff competition for the title of favorite son.

When the second world war broke out, our father resigned his teaching position in Charlottetown and enlisted in the army as a Colonel. The family was moved to Nova Scotia briefly and then finally to Ottawa where my Dad worked in the war effort.

In the years that followed, Frank breezed through grade school and high school skipping grades along the way. By the time he reached college he was three or four years younger than his peers (which I am sure presented its own challenges).

From a very early age Frank knew he wanted to be a priest and even practiced saying mass on the ironing board before the onset of his teenage years. His admission to the seminary was delayed by both our parents and the Oblates because of his young age, despite having met the academic requirements.

Eventually he was admitted to the seminary and after some needed career counselling chose an academic route obtaining PHD's in both Philosophy and Canon Law. Frank was rapidly promoted to full professor at both Ottawa University and Saint Paul's, followed by his deanship and several honorary degrees.

Franks passion for the academic life was **inherited** more than invented. Both our parents were educators and ultimately all 5 of us pursued the academic route at various times in our respective careers including four of us teaching at Ottawa U. While reading some of Frank's family documents after he died, I came across the obituary of our maternal grandmother. A portion reads as follows; "she was educated at Notre Dame Convent from which she graduated being valedictorian of her class. She later attended Prince of Wales College from which she also graduated. Her education however did not stop there as she was an ardent reader and scholar and noted for her intellectual ability".

Our grandmother was born just days before Canada first became a country, raised 12 children on a farm and completed university education during an era when completing **grade** school was an accomplishment for women. It's a pity she passed away before any of us were even born. But I am sure that her love of knowledge was passed on indirectly to Frank and to several generations.

Franks accomplishments in Canon law soon became legendary. We understand that he was one of the Church's foremost canon lawyers whose counsel was sought from every corner of the world. He consulted with every pope during his canon law career and with one exception was usually aligned with their doctrine.

One morning while working in his office he answered his ringing phone. The voice on the other end asked--- Is this Father Francis Morrissey? For which he answered--- yes. The caller then said, I like your name,--- this is Francis, Bishop of Rome calling. Frank was again then asked to take on yet another major assignment for the Church.

Weeks before he died, in his hospital bed he received a letter from the Nuncio a portion of which reads as follows:

His Holiness Pope Francis has learned of your illness, and he asked me to assure you of his closeness to you in prayer. His Holiness wished me to thank you in a particular way for your competent and generous service to the Church and the Holy See over many years.

Franks accomplishments, accolades and formal awards were almost endless. Yet he would rarely mention them. He heeded well the words of Thomas Aquinas "lay not up to yourself treasures on earth". We would usually learn of Frank's accomplishments and recognitions from others. He practiced humility --- by not thinking less of himself, but ----thinking of himself less.

In Frank's day to day work in Canon Law he constantly, but successfully balanced temporal matters with canonical rules. He understood the Church's role and function in an otherwise secular society. When necessary, he knew when to render to Caesar.

He loved the Church's canons (many he authored or updated) but tried not to be rigid in their application. When a law caused harm to a person, he would default, whenever possible, to the needs of the person. He was clearly a quiet, but powerful, behind the scenes liberal, in an

otherwise conservative Church. But in time he would learn that his liberal views of the day would be largely adopted as mainstream tomorrow.

He lived a simple life, having most of his needs provided by his order. He wanted little ---- except when it came to his standard of travel: something he did probably more than anyone else you know.

When someone dies normally a grieving family and cherished memories are left behind. Maybe a few lives altered for better or worse and material possessions passed on. But few of us leave a lasting legacy touching thousands of lives. Clearly Frank meets this exception. He played an enormous role in building the expertise and reputation of St. Paul's bringing it international recognition. His writings and words will be studied and quoted for decades to come. He provided spiritual, moral and life counselling in his role as a priest to countless people. He helped changed the lives of many for the better.

In the words of Robert Louis Stevenson

“The man is a success who has lived well, laughed often, and loved much; who gained the respect of intelligent men and the love of children; who has filled his niche and accomplished his task, who leaves the world better than he found it, whether by an improved poppy, a perfect poem, or a rescued soul; who never lacked appreciation of earth's beauty or failed to express it, who looked for the best in others and gave the best he had.”

Thank you