

Remarks on the life of Father Joseph Callahan, C.S.C.

By
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As I wrote this reflection, I was mindful of one of Father Joe's favorite sayings, "I've never heard anyone complain that the homily was too short."

I have known Father Joe Callahan for 20 years. Many here this evening have known Father Joe much longer. I am certain you could give a much broader, more complete picture of Joe's life.

However, I am reminded that Fr Joe often expressed his belief that we are not only "created" in the image of God, but through the experiences of our lives we are constantly "being created" into the image of God.

So, I will not speak so much about what Fr Joe was; instead, I hope to share the essence of what Father Joe became.

Father Joe Callahan was a man blessed with many gifts. He was a scripture scholar, deeply principled, delightfully funny, a gifted preacher, a songster and music lover, a historian-especially baseball, a loyal brother and friend to all in Holy Cross and to a multitude of laity.

But above all.....Father Joe Callahan....was a healer of hearts.
His greatest gift was his ability to help us reconcile our brokenness.

Joe took our woundedness upon himself...and then led us to a deeper understanding and acceptance of the love and forgiveness of Jesus.

A gentler man.....a kinder man, I have never known.

As we listened to tonight's first reading from the Prophet Isaiah, the tenderness and sensitivity of Father Joe came to life;

"He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice....a bruised reed he will not break."

When we heard Deacon Dan proclaim Jesus' words from the gospel; "that you should go forth and bear fruit."(slight pause)

The truth is.....many of us present this evening are the living fruit, the harvest (if you will) of Fr Joe's life in Christ.

The Dutch priest and spiritualist, Father Henri Nouwen, wrote a book, entitled, "The Wounded Healer."

Nouwen said, "In our own woundedness we can become a source of life for others." (Repeat)

That was Joe. From "his" own woundedness Fr Joe led us to healing....and Jesus was then able to give us...life.

As all of us who loved Fr Joe are aware, for much of his life he fought depression. Joe was also plagued by a variety of physical ailments.

Like Jesus on the cross, Fr. Joe neither complained nor hid the nails.

In his humility, Joe's infirmities were simply there...for all to see.

For those of us who laid the weight of our troubles, sins and sorrows upon Father Joe's heart, the kindness in his eyes and his gentle murmurings brought us healing.

In the Gospel of Matthew we read, "the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words." "Mmmmmm"

Fr Joe, without using words, allowed our hearts to "hear" Jesus saying; "I know how you feel. I do not judge you."

Through Father Joe, the compassion and love of Jesus was made tangible. We could feel it.

As a scripture scholar and student of the Bible, Joe was steeped in knowledge and wisdom. He was deeply respected by his brother clergy as a person...who knew of what he spoke.

But Joe once shared with me....that for all his knowledge of scripture, it was "his interaction with people" that brought to life all that he had learned from books.....And so it was with Jesus, for as HE walked among the people, the scriptures also came to life.

It was through Fr Joe's pain and suffering and the pain that others shared with him.....that Joe himself, came to "feel the love of God" that he had spent a lifetime studying.

Through this holy man, Joe Callahan, many of us were able to embrace and internalize the reality that God loves us not only because of our goodness but despite our failings.

That God loves us because the one thing, the only thing...impossible for God, is that He cannot stop loving us.

Before writing this reflection I spoke with people about "their" memories of Father Joe.

One person, broken hearted at Joe's passing, said; "There will never be another Fr Joe Callahan."

I desperately hope that's not true. For if it is true, we have failed our friend.

For just as Jesus died so that others could know the love of God, so too did Father Joe live, so others could know the love of Jesus.

It is up to us to make sure that we embrace the lessons that Joe taught us.....that we too become wounded healers.

On every retreat, Father Joe would say;
"There is only one rule at the Retreat House....there is only one rule for life.
It's on the sign above the chapel door;
"Love One Another.....Love One Another."

All of us who "love you Joe"....say thank you; For through your suffering, through your love, through your life, you taught us what it means to love as Jesus did.

We bid you farewell Joe.

Rejoice in the Peace of Heaven...dear friend.