

**Solemn High Requiem Mass**  
for  
**Eric Llewellyn Bergman, Sr.**  
**May 25, 2019**  
**Homily for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass**  
of  
**St. Thomas More Catholic Parish**  
celebrated at  
**St. Joseph Catholic Church**  
**116 Theodore St.**  
**Scranton, PA 18508**

**Revelation 21:1-5a, 6b-7**  
**2 Corinthians 4:14-5:1**  
**John 14:1-6**

At my dad's fiftieth wedding anniversary party three years ago, he told this story to those who had come to share in my parents' joy:

About a year before she died, his mother-in-law called him and asked him to come over without her daughter. When he arrived alone at the nursing home where Grandma lived, she told him what a wonderful husband he had been to my mother and how grateful she was that Sylvia Sue had married him. She had waited nearly fifty years to tell him this, but her final words were the ones that left the deepest impression. She said to him, "You know, Eric, you've become a much nicer person since you've become a Catholic." My dad concluded his remarks that afternoon in the Parish Hall downstairs by telling us that his conversion to the Faith once delivered to the saints was the most significant thing he'd done in his life. The lessons my mom chose today are reflections of that life.

The reading from Revelation says, "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people." The verse recalls the Incarnation, Jesus Christ coming to earth to live among us and, in doing so, transforming the world. A good part of my dad's frustration with his job at the welfare department was that he didn't see his work as effecting positive change. Indeed, he suspected that what the state was doing in our poorest neighborhoods was making things worse. In the Catholic Faith, he came to understand the problem, that throwing money at people we alternately fear and despise will not improve their lot. To make their lives better, we have to love them as Jesus loved them, which means living with them as Jesus lived with them. In a nutshell, that's why we bought this church in this particular neighborhood, because my father taught me not to fear the poor, but to love them, and that what they need more than anything is examples of holiness to show them another way. Those who want to do good to the poor must live with them, if they are to have the greatest impact.

My dad's principle vocation was as a husband and father, and anyone who spoke to him more than five minutes knew that he was most proud of the grandchildren and great-grandchildren his daughters and daughters-in-law and granddaughters had borne. The large number, forty, was important because of what we heard in St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians: "It is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God." For my dad, the more children we had in the family meant that there were more little vessels of grace to spread the love. As he welcomed each new baby into the world, it increased his own thanksgiving; but he also noticed that these children increased thanksgiving among his neighbors, all of whom lit up whenever they had the privilege to see our big family in action. "You have a beautiful family," was something my dad never tired of hearing. And each new birth made the family more beautiful, which in turn gave glory to God. Towards the end of his life, my dad alternated between confusion and lucidity. He had a moment of clarity about a month ago, and he got me on the phone to tell me, "I am so grateful that all five of my children are sincerely

religious.” He knew that the Faith had given him his beautiful family, and also that his beautiful family was his gift to God and to the world.

The foundation of his beautiful family was his own stable marriage. My mom and dad taught us by their example how to make it through thick and thin, how to be faithful, and how to endure by continual acts of self-sacrifice. That was their example. But you also know that my father wasn’t afraid to offer impromptu lectures, and one he gave quite often was on the importance of marriage as an institution for the stability of a society and culture. He had spent thirty years of his life picking up the pieces of the sexual revolution, but without the proper resources to adequately address the problem.

In the Catholic Faith he learned the Way, the Truth, and the Life and so was able finally to understand the frustration that he had experienced working in welfare offices across Philadelphia County. He came to know that the principal problem in our poorest neighborhoods is not material but moral, and the solution is therefore not just money but grace, available in the Sacraments of the Church, by which lives are transformed, as the faithful strive for and grow in holiness. Only in being reconciled to the Church did my father find the peace that had eluded him while he was working. He saw clearly how the poor can rightly be served, and he bequeathed that to his five children, who are now passing it down to their children. Such a legacy is sure to increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

Therefore, my dad was a living example of more of St. Paul’s wisdom we heard today: “So we do not lose heart. Though our outer man is wasting away, our inner man is being renewed every day.” Even as his body was falling apart from the ravages of Parkinson’s disease, my dad’s happiness and contentment were increasing. The last fifteen years of his life, after he had retired and during which he came into the Church, were his most fruitful. He didn’t miss Mass until he physically could not go anymore, and he longed to share, even with those who had gone before, the peace that passes all understanding that he had come to know. The last thing he wrote for me were Mass intentions for his grandparents and ancestors, whom he hoped one day to meet, having learned the Truth in the life to come, even if they did not have it on this side of eternity.

My grandmother’s words about the transformation she had observed in my dad’s life were not idle talk. Four days before she died in February, 2016, she asked my sister, Sarah, to take her to Mass. That request issued in her being conditionally baptized and confirmed, at which Mass she also received her First Holy Communion. Our Lord’s Body and Blood was the last food she consumed, and she died twenty hours later. My dad was her godfather.