



Fr. Tim Bannes **by Joe Sixpack**

I want to tell you about a man who truly epitomized the holy priesthood. At this writing, it has been a mere three weeks since his untimely and early death—the death of my friend Fr. Timothy Bannes. Most everybody rightly called him Fr. Bannes, but he was Fr. Tim to me. The things I write herein could have been rightly said during his life, but must be said now that he's gone.

Fr. Tim graced this earth only 52 years. Well, you may as well add another year to that, as he died three days shy of his 53rd birthday. And he was only at our parish—Gildehaus Church (how the parish got the name is a story unto itself for another time)—for three years. Father was the picture of health, but his death demonstrates to us that when God wants us we're going. No delays. No bargaining. No early warning signals.

Fr. Tim loved his parishioners, as every good parish priest does. I can attest to the genuineness of his love because he loved me, despite that I'm not all that lovable. Father was a "late vocation," meaning he was in his forties when he was ordained by Raymond Leo Cardinal Burke, then Archbishop Burke of the Diocese of St. Louis. So he was only a priest for about a decade.

Joe Sixpack only exists because of Fr. Tim (you can read all about it at GrowMyParish.com). He had some parishioners who wanted to gain a deeper understanding of our holy and ancient faith, but like most parish priests of the day, he simply didn't have time to sew another thing such as a class into his schedule. Besides the parishioners who wanted to learn more, Father recognized the need for all Catholics to gain a deeper knowledge of the teachings of the Church, due to the faulty, deficient and watered down catechesis of the '70s and much of the '80s (and we're still suffering from it today). So Joe Sixpack was born as a way of feeding all parishioners who read the bulletin without trying to sell them on the need for attending a class and meeting the subsequent resistance. This is evidence of his great love for us all. But there was much more to this priest of the living God than just his love for his parishioners.

A truly dedicated priest realizes he has two primary responsibilities specific to his vocation: to become holy and provide the sacraments to his flock. And no one could deny that Father perfectly fulfilled those responsibilities.

We are all wont to say that a priest or parent was a saint after they're gone, but I think saying that about Fr. Tim is more than a mere platitude. When a penitent goes to the same priest with regularity and frequency, the priest learns the penitent's soul. But that works the other way too. Long before we ever talked about personal sanctity, it was apparent that Fr. Tim obviously wanted to become holy. That is a topic we eventually addressed, and he told me the thing he wanted most—the most important thing to him—was to become a saint. As I've written on these pages before, personal sanctity is every Catholic's responsibility, and Fr. Tim took Jesus at His word on that (Matthew 5:48).

Fr. Tim was fiercely loyal to the Church and her teachings, which is another mark of a good priest (indeed, any good Catholic). But his personal holiness manifested itself in other more

pronounced ways. For example, to those who recognized such things, we could see that Father would often lapse into ecstasy while elevating the Host at Mass. It was apparent from looking at his face that while his feet were firmly planted on earth at the high altar, his soul was soaring to heaven in adoration of His Majesty in the Most Holy Eucharist—Fr. Tim’s Prophet, Priest, King, Savior, and only true love. Father understood and was deeply devoted to the reality of the true Presence of Jesus—Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity—in the Most Holy Eucharist.

You can tell how well a priest understands the nature of the priesthood and his devotion to it by the way he celebrates Mass. Of all the hundreds of priests I’ve seen say Mass, none of them were more devout and respectful than Fr. Tim. Father said the liturgy in perfect conformity to the rubrics, and he did so with great love and devotion.

I knew the first time I met Father in the confessional that he was a great priest. He had a deep devotion to the Curé of Ars, St John Vianney, the patron saint of parish priests. So great was his devotion that he kept a statue and holy cards of the Curé in the confessional, so that he could ask the saint for strength, wisdom, and courage while he waited for a penitent to come in to unburden his soul of sin.

Fr. Tim also had a deep and abiding love for his “girlfriend”—the Blessed Virgin Mary. He loved her and believed in the efficacy of her intercession. This was evidenced by his love and daily recitation of the rosary.

Father also understood the need of divine mercy for his own soul. His favorite devotion was St. Faustina’s devotion, given to the world by Our Lord Himself, the Divine Mercy chaplet. Indeed, I can’t speak for anyone else, but Fr. Tim gave me the chaplet to pray as my penance after confession more than anything else.

Fr. Tim was a humble man. You never heard him talk about himself or his accomplishments. However, he did project great pride when speaking of his parishioners and the children of our parish school. He loved us all so much.

After my stroke, I could no longer go to confession at the church—my wheelchair wouldn’t fit into the confessional. So Fr. Tim would come to my home almost every week to hear my confession. Since he was also my spiritual director, Father and I often spent hours talking about spiritual matters—he in my favorite recliner and I in my wheelchair. Every time I look at that recliner now, my eyes tear up and I miss him terribly. Come to think of it, if Fr. Tim died a saint, I own a really big third class relic! Father would be embarrassed by me saying that, but he’d have a laugh about it nonetheless.

And the question of his sainthood, although not officially recognized by the Church, requires an additional reflection. Yes, everyone who knew Fr. Timothy Bannes believes he was a saint on earth. Consequently, we tend to believe he bypassed purgatory all together. But Fr. Tim would be the first to tell you not to make such a foolish assumption. He would ask us to remember to pray for the repose of his soul. Indeed, he did ask me to do that one day when we talked about the Four Last Things—Death, Judgment, Heaven, and Hell. (He also told me to pray to him, as he would be able to more powerfully aid us from heaven.) That’s the greatest act of love we can offer the priest who loved us so much. So I both *pray for him and pray to him* daily.

Give him eternal rest, O Lord. May Your light shine upon him forever. May Fr. Tim’s soul and all the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace.

Fr. Tim, pray for us.

Got questions about anything I wrote about Fr. Tim and how it applies to your life? Go to JoeSixpackAnswers.com for answers.