

At the funeral mass of Pope John Paul II, where he acted as the main celebrant, the future Pope, Benedict XVI, eulogized his close friend. In his remarks, he explored why John Paul had a deep and unshakeable devotion to the mother of Jesus, Mary. He suggested that the loss of the Pope's mother when he was only nine years of age may have been the decisive factor. He said, "He heard the words of the crucified Lord as addressed personally to him: "Behold, your mother".

When Father Vaughan celebrated his fortieth anniversary as a priest in 1990, he was 65 years old. In his reflections on his life, he told the members of his congregation that he had no fear of death. Like Saint Paul, who wrote "For my desire is to depart from this life and be with Christ, Fr. Vaughan, who lost his mother in infancy, said he wanted to see the face of his mother in eternity. His dream was finally realized on the day of his death. As a community of faith, we truly believe he is reunited with his mother who died at a very young age.

Let me share one revealing story about the simple faith of a devoted priest. One Christmas I gave Father Vaughan a rather unusual gift of a death mask, the likeness of the face of Christ after his death on the cross. Sometime later I asked him if he liked my gift. Without hesitation, he replied, "I hated it". As you can imagine, I was very disappointed. I had selected the gift from a catalogue with great care and deliberation. I asked him why he disliked the gift. His reply was forthright and a little surprising. "I celebrate the Resurrection and not his death. I am a "Resurrection priest". "Does that make me the death priest", asked I

Not only did he see the good in everyone, he had a most cheerful and optimistic appreciation of life, the life he enjoyed in Christ as a Catholic priest.

With the assistance of a former Pontiff, let me close with the words, "We entrust your dear son, Father Vaughan to the Mother of God, your mother, who guided you each day and who will guide you now to the eternal glory of her son, Our Lord Jesus Christ.

A footnote: One of my sweetest memories of Father Vaughan was of an Advent season several years ago. For several weeks he prepared for Christmas mass by playing a popular song once recorded by the legendary entertainer, Bing Crosby: "I'll be home for Christmas". It turned out to be the theme of his sermon. I heard this song ad nauseam over and over again until Christmas Eve. I feared I was losing my sanity. You may be assured that I like the songs of Crosby, but enough is enough. I made no protest. I simply did not want to offend a priest I deeply admired.

In the last months of his life Father Vaughan expressed a desire to return to his home of many years at Sacred Heart Rectory. Regrettably his immobility and weakness made it impossible for me to grant his wish. But now, having lost Father Vaughan whose passing away has left me and so many others grieving, I can say that he has indeed come home for Christmas, and is now enjoying the celestial feast with his dear mother whom he lost so many years ago as an infant. A family of faith is re-united for the last time.