

## Funeral homily for Father Lloyd Rebreyo

“Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his faithful”. So writes the Psalmist, the inspired poet of the Old Testament, to those who have suffered the loss of a loved one and are grieving his absence.

I wish to express my deepest sympathies to all of you gathered here this morning. May you be comforted in your time of sorrow.

In one of his books, the Nobel Prize winning author Elie Weisel, shares a remarkable story of a legendary Eastern European Hasidic rabbi, Naphtali, who lived at the end of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. As his life was drawing to a close, the rabbi unexpectedly went into seclusion. He turned away from his own followers. Surprisingly and symbolically, he remained silent.

Then came the last day. The sick father and his son are alone.

“Speak, father”, begged the son. “Say something, one word”. The old man looks at him and says nothing. “You can”, pleads the son. “I know you can; you can speak. “Why don’t you want to speak, father?”

The old master stares at him for a long, long moment and then replies in a slow, burning whisper: “I.....am.....afraid”. Do you understand? Do you understand, my son. I....am....afraid.

Weisel asks, “Afraid of what? Of whom? We shall never know.

Weisel’s story reminds me of the final hour of my paternal grandfather’s life. While visiting him one day in the hospice unit of St. Peter’s Hospital, I found him speaking softly to my grandmother. In words clearly spoken he said to her, “I am afraid”. MY grandmother took him by the hand and whispered in his ear, “Dad, you have no reason to fear. I am here with you. I promise that I will not leave your bedside”. My grandmother was a woman of faith who believed in life everlasting.

To fear death is only human. Even our Blessed Lord chose to suffer the fear of death for our sakes. In the garden of Gethsemane on the night before his death, Jesus prayed that the cup---- the cup of suffering— pass before him. Yet he was resolute in his determination to follow the path designated for him by his Heavenly Father. He said, “Not my will but yours be done”. In his death on the cross, Jesus showed the full extent of his obedience. His was a total self-offering. He said, “I always do what is pleasing to Him”

In John the Evangelist’s account of Our Lord’s death we are likely to overlook a significant detail. Jesus bowed his head to die. Was he too weak to hold up his head? Was his breathing labored? Saint Augustine recognized in the bowing of his head the supreme gesture of his personal consent to suffer death, one of life’s greatest mysteries.

Christ’s death is the consummation of a life lived in the service of others. In the fourth Eucharistic prayer, the priest intones the words, “For when the hour had come, for Him to be glorified by you, father Most Holy, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end”. Into the hands of his Father, he commended his spirit.

Father Lloyd was my dinner companion one day of the week. Given his over fifty years as a priest and his countless travels around the world, he had many tales to share with me. He singled out the many boys he trained to serve mass at this very church. It gave him great satisfaction that he fulfilled one of his primary responsibilities as a parish priest. He also shared with me memories of his days in Ireland as the Dean of Discipline in the seminary where young men prepare to receive the Sacrament of Holy Orders.

Living in an apartment close by in Menands in his retirement, Father Lloyd faithfully celebrated mass daily. He often asked me to supply him with communion host and wine so that he could honor his commitment to the One who said, "Do this in memory of Me". He never failed to be conscientious in carrying out his priestly duties.

In the last hours of his priestly life, this beloved priest confided to a nurse his thought on his imminent death. He said, "I am at peace with death. I am not in fear of it. Death is not an end but a beginning. I fulfilled all my duties as a priest. What was expected of me has been accomplished. I have my bags packed. I am ready for the last journey." So true!

Death crowned his life. Like his Lord, Jesus, he could say, "It is finished".

In the Book of Revelation, the seer writes, "Blessed are those who die in the Lord, for their good deeds go before them". Father Lloyd died a Roman Catholic priest. He often spoke with gratitude for his vocation. He died in the Lord.

May he be granted a merciful judgment.

Rest in peace, my friend. And once my pilgrimage comes to an end, May I be reunited with you in paradise.