

Funeral homily for a former classmate

On a November afternoon in late November of 1963, a popular daily soap opera, "As the World turns", was in progress when suddenly, and without advance notice, a graphic appeared on the screen. A voice was heard, saying, "We interrupt this program to bring you a special news bulletin" after which the viewing audience saw the news anchor, Walter Cronkite, speak in a solemn tone of voice the words, "President Kennedy has been shot". A short time later he announced to a nation-wide audience the president's death. At the time how did the American people react to the unexpected tragedy? Not surprisingly, with shock, disbelief, sadness and anger. Our nation was plunged into mourning.

Now fast forward to early January of this year. I received a call from one of my former classmates, Ken Kennedy, a retired police detective, who informed me of Kevin's sudden death. Earlier in the day, one of Kevin's close friends, Butch Stackman, conveyed the heartbreaking news to him. And what was my reaction? I was horrified. And when I learned he died alone, I was deeply shaken. I had known Kevin since the days of my childhood.

My brothers and sisters, the greatest lessons in life come to us when we face our own death and the death of those close to us. The moment we lose someone dear to us, something dies within us.. Our life does not continue as normal. The American poet, Robert Lowell, was once asked by an inquiring journalist about what bothered him most about life. "That people die" was his terse reply. Time and again in Sacred Scripture are we taught a much needed lesson about the brevity of a human life. For example, in the Old Testament book of Psalms, we read, "Man is like a breath. His days are a passing shadow" and a lovely prayer, "Lord, let me know my end and what is the measure of my days. Let me know how fleeting I am". In learning of Kevin's untimely death, I could help but recall that the two of us were born in the same year, 1954. The hour of my death draws near.

Death comes like a thief in the night for some of us, but not even death, which is and always will remain, a great mystery, can rob me or you of my pleasant memories of my former classmate. My delightful memories of Kevin include his friendship with his close friend and former classmate, Mike Connery, who was one of the first members of the class of 1972 to die, and the others, Butch Stackman, John Andres, George Shaugnessy, Tom Link, Mike Diaz, Lee Barringer and the late Mark Germain. I have vivid memories from my adolescent years Kevin playing basketball down on the Woodlawn Ave. courts and playing poker with his pals in the woods behind the black top. And who can forget Kevin's dancing days at the old Nick's Sneaky Pete's on the Latham circle. More recently, Kevin arranged for me and my classmates to meet at the Gateway diner on Central Avenue in Albany.

Kevin and I had something in common: a general disdain for the life of a cadet enrolled in a military school. I suppose the two of us were not suitable material. If I outranked Kevin, ---I was a Sargant first class—it was not because I excelled as a young cadet. I am pleased to say that Kevin and I were on the same page.

For faithful Christians, death does not have the last word. For them life begins with death. One of the articles of our faith is found in the creed: "I believe in everlasting life". Our homeland is in heaven. We live here for a few days and must move on. The church's mission is to lead us home to God. In this life we are no more than temporary boarders; only in heaven will we dwell in our own home. As long as we live on earth our lodgings will not be permanent. God has created us for eternal life. For this reason alone, death can be one of the most beautiful moments in life. It means being greeted by Christ Himself.

Close to fifty years ago, a talented young songwriter, Laura Nyro, composed a song that was later recorded by a renowned rock and roll band, Blood, Sweat and Tears. Perhaps you may remember the song: "And when I Die". On a day of a funeral her words are especially noteworthy. "I'm not scared of dying, and I don't really care. If its peace you find in dying, then let the dying time be near". Now recall the word of Saint Paul from our second reading: "For if we live, we live for the Lord, and if we die we die for the Lord; so then, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's". Indeed, we belong to the Lord. Christ is our peace. And today we pray that our dear Kevin rest in peace, in the peace of Christ.

Earlier this morning, as part of my daily prayer, I read the reading of the day for Monday of the first week of ordinary time from the Old Testament Book of Sirach. I could not fail to think of Kevin as I read the following words" "He who fears the Lord will have a happy end--- even on the day of his death he will be blessed". Kevin appeared to take his Catholic faith seriously .My sister, Kathy, Often spoke of Kevin's presence at Sunday mass in this very church

In closing, I must mention Kevin's parents. His brother, Tom, told me that Kevin was very kind and attentive to their many needs in their old age. Death can be seen as a blessing if it means being re-united with our loved ones who have crossed over to the other shore of life. Jesus has prepared a place for us in the Father's capacious house, where there are many dwellings.

May God grant Kevin a merciful judgment.

Saint John de La Salle, pray for him.

Goodbye Kevin

Till we meet again.