

Funeral homily for Richard Clements:

Arguably, one of the simple delights in this life is the unexpected "Surprise", which is usually a wonderful revelation and a blessing. So often the one for whom the surprise is intended is first asked to cover his eyes in order to bring a sense of joyous anticipation of what is to be revealed.. Once his eyes are uncovered he can expect to be rewarded. The surprise was meant for him, and for his eyes only. He is enchanted, even bowled over by the discovery. Perhaps he has seen a familiar face from the distant past. Whatever the surprise, it is certainly one of life's most precious and personally rewarding moments.

Who can be said about the God we worship? Several years ago, in 2014, Pope Francis preached the Word of God on Christianity's holiest day, Easter Sunday,, and openly declared that the God of Christian revelation often takes us by surprise. He pointed out that the Resurrection of Christ was a shock even to his closest followers, and drew the conclusion that "our God is a God of surprises".

Time and again, we are stunned by the extraordinary lives of the saints, the astonishing miracles witnessed in every age and a Church that remains vital after two thousand years. We are incredulous whenever a person we consider irredeemably lost inexplicably turns to Christ.

We must never cease to wonder!

As someone who has been called to the sacramental priesthood and has been a cancer survivor since 1984, I am often overwhelmed as I muse on the mystery of God's grace in my life. As a man of deep faith, I continue to be stunned.

After death, there is a great surprise in store for many of the Christian faithful. The prayer of the Psalmist, the Jewish poet of the Old Testament, is answered, and is beyond the wildest dreams of the petitioner; "When shall I come and see the face of the Lord?" Faithfulness in this life pays huge dividends in the life to come. In his first letter to the Christian community at Corinth, Saint Paul writes, "What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard and what has not entered the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love him" (I Cor. 2:9).

In death, a profound mystery, the human being encounters God. In his memorable Sermon on the Mount, Christ speaks of the encounter in one of the Beatitudes. "Blessed are the pure of heart", he teaches, "for they shall see God".

Through the grace of God, even the baptized Christian can surprise us. Dick Clements was one such person. From Jesus Christ, he received many gifts. He was a devoted husband, loving father and grandfather and was an active member of two churches, Saint Henry's and the church of which I am a proud pastor, Sacred Heart.

Dick was a skilled craftsman. In this year consecrated to St. Joseph the worker and Guardian of the Redeemer, his talents were of some significance from the standpoint of faith.. His hands were blessed by the Lord.

But I like to think that in the third decade of the twenty-first century, his fifty three years of marriage to his beloved Ruth was the greatest surprise of all. Their faithful witness was praiseworthy. Their years participating in the Marriage encounter movement reaped a bountiful harvest for their children and grandchildren.

I should like to think that when Dick awakened from the sleep of death, he heard the word "surprise" shouted.. It must have been thrilling.

Lord, we entrust our brother into your hands. Welcome him into your presence, so that he may enjoy eternal life and peace. Amen