

@ By way of preamble: It is perhaps appropriate for me to tell you how it is that *I* come to be standing here, as preacher, when both our bishop and our cathedral dean are present, not to mention other *very distinguished* senior clergy:

@ A little over fifteen years ago, when Fr. Bunday was about to celebrate the 50th anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood, he did me the high honor of inviting me to preach. That was, of course, to be here, at All Saints'. And I shall never forget two aspects of that old invitation:

@ The first was that that 50th-anniversary sermon was to be a sort audition for *this* appointment at the funeral. He smiled broadly when he informed me of this — that unforgettable Fr. Bunday smile. And when, afterwards,

he told me that I had the job, I was duly flattered.

Though I must confess that as the years went by, from time to time I wondered if in the end *he* would be preaching at *my* funeral. The second thing he stipulated back then was that there would be no honorarium, no fee, attached to my preaching. He was quite clear about this, and again seemed to enjoy saying it. I thought it especially considerate of him to mention this beforehand, since, if I completely bombed, I could console myself with the knowledge that he got what he paid for. (I, of course, had no sort of stipend in mind.)

@ In my homily that day, I did try to turn the tables on him a bit. Because near the end of it, I addressed him directly from this pulpit, person to person, just as Bishop Keeler of the Diocese of Minnesota presumably did, back in 1945 — or whoever the preacher was that day. As many of you know, an ordination address like that is commonly called a “charge.” And so my little joke was

that a sermon without a *fee* is not necessarily a sermon without a *charge*.

@ Well, in preparation for that great occasion, I wrote to every one of the parishes he had served in his many years of ministry, soliciting congratulations, well wishes, tokens of gratitude, interesting anecdotes. It was a risk, I knew, because so many of the principal figures would by now be dead, or would have left town; or their memories dulled by extreme old age or infirmity. But many *did* reply — former senior wardens, junior wardens, other church officers, and regular parishioners. It was most moving, at the reception afterwards, to read and present to him *so many* and *so deeply heartfelt* recollections, dating in some cases back to the 1940s, and bringing to life again the various phases of his ministry. Echoes of countless moments of grace — at the altar; teaching the faith; weddings; preparation for confirmation; celebrating

joyous festivals; helping a family bear its loss of a loved one; pastoral care in the parish and in people's homes. And as a recurring theme: *constancy*, *devotion* to our Lord, to his Church, to his people.

@ The last time I saw Fr. Bunday, at St. John's Home, we chatted about many things. By my estimate, his contribution to the conversation was 80% of the words spoken — maybe more. Of sound mind, very sharp, only once or twice losing track of a complex thought. Confident, but in his own paradoxically modest way. And straightforward — his Yes still yes, as always, and his No no. Fully aware, and more or less in control — except of his increasingly feeble physical frame. That broad grin was very much in evidence.

@ He reminded me that he had been *summa cum laude* at Carleton. He told me of the new and magnificent two-volume scholarly edition of *Don Quixote* that he

had received as a gift this past Christmas, and boasted that he made his way through the first volume of it, footnotes and all — in Spanish, of course. He reported that in January, he had re-read the liberal Roman Catholic theologian Hans Küng’s famous little book, *Infallible?* — in German, of course. Thus he continued to nourish his lively spirit with a lively mind. And so it went on. Ordinary things. But somehow the ordinary begins to be of more than ordinary significance when you know that the end is near.

@ And then, after the anointing and some prayers, as I was about to leave he reminded me of what I had once agreed to do. And I confirmed it with him.

@ There was not a word, either then or previously, about what might be said, or not said, on *this* occasion. But I was always rather confident that he and I shared the conviction that a funeral homily is principally to be

not a *eulogy* but a proclamation of the Gospel. Or perhaps I might say, he who is chiefly to be eulogized, to the glory of God the Father, is not the recently deceased but our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ — the one whose death and resurrection, whose glorious ascension and future coming in glory, constitute the *hope* in which we all stand tonight.

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@ And so our attention is rightly drawn *now*, as of first importance, to the Gospel (John 11:21-27), in which our Lord has come on the scene in “Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha” (11:1). It was Mary, St. John tells us at the start of all this, who anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair (11:2). Curious, that, because as you will remember, in the story that hasn’t happened yet. Another curious thing, well known, is that when Jesus first learns that his

friend is ill, he deliberately delays his visit — until Lazarus is dead, as it turns out, which Jesus of course knows about. So that when he does arrive, Jesus is greeted with Martha’s poignant statement (or is it even a mild rebuke?), “Lord, if you had been here, my brother, Lazarus, would not have died.” These words are soon repeated by Mary: “Lord, if you had been here, my brother, Lazarus, would not have died.”

@ And then, a moment later, John writes, “Jesus wept” (11:35). But we are not told exactly why, and there is speculation about it. It means “to shed tears,” but not necessarily “to weep” as in grief — perhaps, some have said, he is lamenting that *no-one* fully understands just yet. It is the only place in the whole New Testament where this particular word is used — though John won’t yet have known that!

@ What Martha says she believes is that Jesus is “the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.” But as I am sure you noticed, that doesn’t quite answer what Jesus asks her. Nor, in what follows, does John say anything about what *Mary* thought, or believed, except what both sisters get to say about Jesus not being there. So professional scholars debate endlessly whether in this Gospel story Martha, or Mary, or neither, or both, “get the point.” (We are not in Luke [10:38-42] here, where Martha is the practical one, apparently, and Mary the contemplative.) “The point” — presumably — is that with the coming of Jesus, “life” and “resurrection,” are somehow redefined, or — as I would prefer to say — re-located. But that’s to get a bit ahead of things.

@ What to me is decisive is *this*: When word gets out that Lazarus has, in fact, died — just a little beyond the assigned Gospel reading — a crowd of mourners

follows Mary as she goes quickly out of the house, supposing that she is going to the tomb. The tomb, so they reckon, is the place to be, the place to go. And certainly there is nothing wrong with that. But as *they* hasten to the tomb, *Mary* hastens not to the tomb but to *Jesus*. And John says that “when she came to where Jesus was, *she saw him, and fell at his feet*” (11:32).

@ In life, and especially as death draws near and then takes place, our calling is to go quickly so as to be at the feet of Jesus. (Or so it will seem. In actuality, as many saints will say, it is *he* who comes to *us*.) That is our proper place, because we are his disciples and children of the ever-living God. And as disciples, as beloved children, we do not *presume* on God’s grace, though as baptized persons it is promised to us.

@ Because in Christian Scripture and in Christian tradition, there is a wholesome interplay between God’s

promise and its *fulfillment*; between *hope* and its *realization*, between eternal life already experienced in the *here and now* and life as we shall know it *in eternity*.

@ So that, as I understand my faith, the believer who at the grave makes his or her song, “Alleluia,” is also bidden to pray, “Lord, have mercy.” This is not out of *unfaith*, but in recognition of who God is, who I am, and what almost unspeakable work of salvation God in Christ has wrought for me and for you. At what *cost*, at what *price*, redemption has been brought to light.

@ This, I believe, means that it is not for form’s sake alone that in our prayers we shall make these petitions to our Lord, “*Give* our brother eternal life”; “*Bring* our brother to the joys of heaven”; “*Give* him fellowship with all your saints”; “*Grant* him a place at the table in your heavenly kingdom.” And at the Commendation: “*Give rest* to your servant with your saints. . . .” And

when, at the end, the choir sings *In Paradisum*, we are to remember that this means “into,” not “in.”

@ That, I take it, also accounts for the brief question-and-answer exchange in the Prayer Book Catechism, “Why do we pray for the dead?” “We pray for them, because we still hold them in our love, and we trust that in God’s presence those who have chosen to serve him will *grow* in his love, *until* they see him as he is.”

@ Yes, it *matters* to God and to God’s church that we are here, tonight, to give thanks for the life and ministry of this man, this priest, this human temple in whom the Holy Spirit has been pleased to dwell.

@ But it also *matters* to God, and I believe that it matters as a moment of witness to the world, that we make our earnest prayer to God on behalf of this soul,

not out of *fear* but out of *faith*, knowing that He is faithful who has promised eternal life.

@ Most of all, it *matters*, that at the time of our dear brother’s death, we have come out to this holy place, to the place where Jesus is, in the midst of his people — our living Lord, *who is resurrection and who is life*.

@ Amen.