

Saying goodbye to special friends

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

You may recall that after one of the annual reunions of the Bills family, I wrote about my aunt, Mary Willard. I mentioned, at the time, that among her strong loyalties was her family, her Catholic faith, her Irish heritage, the Democratic Party and the New York Yankees.

She was proud of them all and quick to their defense should anyone say anything less than positive about any one of them. It was fun to be with her. There was always a great deal of laughter whenever we got her going about those topics. I remember that she got a kick out of my mention of her special loyalties and her encouragement to stick it out with the Bronx Bombers even through the lean years.

My Aunt Mary died early Friday morning. Her family and friends gathered Monday morning at St. Mary's, Waterford, to commend her to the mercy of the God she loved so much, to celebrate her life, and to comfort one another at the loss of a friend dear to us all. After the funeral liturgy and

the committal service we gathered with her children, Jack and Mary Ann and their families.

We enjoyed good food and the company of all. Most of all we enjoyed the happy memories Mary left with all of us. We remembered her love for singing and how Mary and her four sisters used to entertain at local variety shows years ago. We recalled that she was a shrewd poker player who had great fun at the game. I was always impressed that she welcomed kids into the games when they were around and enjoyed it when the young ones managed to win a pot. And, of course, we talked about her coffee. If not the worst ever brewed, it was close to it. I always maintained it provided the basic formula for STP motor treatment.

There was a lot of laughter today. But there was sadness, too. Mary left two children, nine grandchildren, 11 great-grandchildren and many other relatives, including my mother — Mary's sister and the last of the 13 children of Helen and Nelson Bills. Tears flowed across the generations and spilled beyond her blood family

into the wider family who had come to know her kindness.

As I drove back home on the Thruway, I was remembering the joy and the sadness of the day when I heard the stunning news of the death of Roger Robach, the New York State Assembly's deputy majority leader from Rochester. It's tough, at any time, to lose the presence, commitment and values of a person like Roger. It's the more difficult that he has been called home at such a young age.

In today's paper, I read comments from Roger's colleagues from this area and from all parts of our state. They praised him as a person of integrity, as a servant of the people, as a defender of unborn life, as a staunch supporter of high quality education for all children, as a man willing to sacrifice himself for those in need. I believe that he was all of those things and much more.

Roger had strong, clear convictions. He committed himself to expressing those convictions to the best of his ability in the sometimes complex, always demanding arena of politics and public service. In doing so he offered



to all of us a strong model of what it means to live out our gospel call to be salt of the earth and light of the world.

Mary and Roger. Different stories, different spans of years among us. Yet both leave strong legacies and lively hope.

Peace to all, especially to those most saddened by the loss of these wonderful friends.

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