

Priests touched the lives of many

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

There was a wonderful gathering this afternoon (Monday, Feb. 6) at the Rochester Institute of Technology to honor the memory of Father Jim Sauers, who served as campus minister at RIT for 10 years prior to his death late last month.

I was very much impressed by the celebration and have revisited it in the hours since, trying to clarify for myself just what it was that meant so much to me. I know that I was impressed that so many from the R.I.T. community, not only members of the Roman Catholic parish, participated. And I was moved by the care and affection with which the event was planned and carried out. There were photos, music and touching words. There was wonderful laughter and not a few tears. It was clear to me that those who gathered to honor Jim Sauers cared as deeply for him as he did for them.

It was not until I began to struggle with this column that it dawned on me what was at the core of the tribute paid to Jim by the R.I.T. community today — at least, as that tribute came to rest in my own heart. I would put it this way: Jim was so much at home with his own humanity and so respectful and accepting of the humanity of his sisters and brothers that he became for them a powerful vessel and sign of Christ's own compassion for all of us. He did many things for many people. There's no doubt about that. Probably more than we'll ever know about short of our ultimate reunion with him. But in the last



A LONG THE WAY

analysis it was not what he did for others. It was who he was for others. It was the ardor, simplicity and single-mindedness with which he expressed his care for them.

Although at this writing we have yet to gather in the Liturgy of Christian Burial to thank God for the life and ministry of Father Tony Valente, who died early Saturday morning, I know from the unparalleled outpouring of affection for him during his weeks of illness that he had a similar impact on more people than we'll ever know.

Tony put a human face on the kindness of Christ for all he served during his 36 years of priestly ministry. And it may be that, beautiful as that kindness was through all of the years, it shone no more brilliantly than it did in the final days of his illness when his first concern

was not for self but for those who were so worried about him. Several individuals have said to me that things Tony had long encouraged without visible results when he was well were coming to pass in the days of his illness.

I have known of that nature of kindness in Tony since 1957 when I first met him at St. Bernard's Seminary. One expression of that kindness of which I have only recently become aware is the quiet support he gave to so many of his brother priests over the years. I know that all of them will miss very deeply that kind of loving presence.

Without doubt the loss of these two beloved priests has touched many of us with sadness, with a deep and understandable sense of loss. We can only pray that the faith and charity that join us and the memories of compassion and kindness that these two good men leave for us will give us joyful spirits for the work God asks us to do.

Among my fond hopes for good gifts to be realized from these experiences of loss are: 1.) that those already ordained to the presbyterate will appreciate anew how deeply a priest in touch with his own humanity and that of his sisters and brothers can impact the lives of others for the good; and 2.) that those who are thinking about a vocation to the priesthood, and who knew Jim and/or Tony, or now hear about them, might be a shade more convinced than they were before that being a priest can be a vocation of lifelong, life-giving meaning.

Peace to all.



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