

## Children open to the grace of God

It was a moment of sadness and loss for 6-year-old Patrick Weil. For that reason he shed tears often during the Liturgy of Christian Burial for his great uncle, Msgr. Gil Weil, priest of the Diocese of Buffalo.

Patrick took comfort from his mother, who had her right arm around him all the time. But occasionally his quiet fears gave way to sobs, and he drew even closer to her so he could draw on her strength and muffle the sound of crying against her body.

It was touching to note the grief the 6-year-old experienced at the death of his 69-year-old great-uncle and godfather. There was a remarkable physical resemblance between them. I take it that they enjoyed a beautiful sense for one another and a tender friendship.

Later on, I learned that Gil had given first Holy Communion to all of Patrick's siblings and cousins. Now Patrick had been worried about how that would work out for him.

The Gospel reading for the liturgy that day was from the eleventh chapter of the Gospel of Matthew: "... what you have hidden from the learned and the clever you have revealed to the merest children... Come to me all you who are weary and find life burdensome, and I will refresh you ... learn from me for I am gentle and humble of heart."

The experience has stayed with me since

### along the way



BY BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK

the celebration yesterday. I suppose that is because particular moments in our liturgical celebrations can touch any one of us in significant ways. In this instance several elements combined to draw me to prayer and reflection.

1. I have always had the conviction that God is very close to even the youngest of children, opening their hearts and minds to a knowledge and love that can be quite profound. They know and love as children, of course, but they can teach us much about God's ways with them if we but pay close attention to them — how they pray, treat one another and deal with issues that are significant to people of all ages.

2. Gil was as analytic and rational a person as I have met. He loved ideas and good order and rigorous thought. I am fascinated by the friendship he had with his grandnephew. I suspect that Gil paid close attention to what Patrick had to say, and that Patrick knew he did so.

My guess is that Patrick — in whatever

way 6-year-olds do that — put Gil in deeper touch with his own real capacity for spontaneity and joy.

3. The Gospel passage proclaimed at the liturgy yesterday was a very important one for me on my retreat last month. Like Gil, I am much older than Patrick; like young Patrick, I occasionally feel burdened and uncertain about what the future may hold.

4. More so since than during the liturgy for Gil, I have thought of our high school Youth Convention to be held at Geneseo this weekend. Among the many reasons why I love that gathering is the opportunity it affords to experience the goodness and beauty of our young people.

They are Patricks writ large and still very much grownup in their capacity to know and to love the Lord. They are good beyond their knowing of it. It's just a joy to be close to that.

I first met Gil 35 years ago when we were graduate students together. His funeral liturgy yesterday carried much memory for me, not the least of which was his patient courage with chronic illness.

But most of all I came away from the event with the realization that every moment of life — from beginning to end — is graced because God is in it, and with the further awareness that it is often in and through living relationships that we realize that truth.

Peace to all.

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