



Mike Mergen/Photo intern

Assisted by Father Timothy Brown, Bishop Clark leads the service at the All Saints Museum at Holy Sepulchre Cemetery. Looking on (from left) are Bishop Hickey's niece, Mary Campbell Caldwell; her husband, Patrick Caldwell; grandniece, Alison Caldwell; and longtime friend Sylvia Nagy.

All the 'great ones' have faith tested

Father Joseph A. Hart gave the homily at the solemn evening prayer vigil for Bishop Dennis W. Hickey, October 10:

In the first part of this century, when Susan B. Anthony was rushed to a Toledo hospital after having collapsed on a speaking tour, a *New York Times* reporter received a telegram instructing him: "If she lives, write 5,000 words; if she dies, unlimited."

Dennis, our priest, our pastor, our father, our friend has died. I know that 5,000 words won't do him justice. But you can breathe a sigh of relief I won't go for the unlimited either.

Yet words are important. Like all true Irishmen, Bishop Dennis loved words. Words were his ally, words were his vehicle of humor, words were his means of persuasion. He loved the printed word, the spoken word, the sung word, the argued word, the humorous word. Words helped him to calm troubled waters, to build lasting bridges, to move immovable objects, which is to say priests. Who here cannot still hear the cadence of his words ringing in his ears? "I am persuaded that ..." "It grieves me ..." "The great Gehazi and I ..." "I thought you would have been pleased with this opportunity to intensify your overseas shuttle service ..."

Words. Words of all shapes and forms and varieties. But of them all, the most important was the word of God that he served and he preached and he lived.

Tonight the word of God comes to us in St. Paul's Second Letter to the Christians at Corinth and speaks to us of death and life.

Paul, the tent maker, reminds some neophyte Christians that, though the outer body might be wasting away, God has another plan: For we know that this earthly house of ours, this tent which is the body, when it is pulled down, we have a building which comes from God, a house not made by human hands, eternal and in the Heavens.

"But how can this be?" the Corinthians must have asked. They had pushed him earlier about "this body." No. That what is planted is simply material. What is raised is spiritual. What is put into the body is mortal. What is raised is immortal. He said, "The one who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee."

The questions of the Corinthians must have pushed him further: "How can we be sure?" Paul's answer is we can't. We walk by faith and not by sight. We walk by faith. We walk by faith. Faith is a trust, an abiding confidence in the one whose word is trustworthy. It is not a grasping. It is not a holding on. It is not a having. It's not a rationalizing. It's not a figuring out. It's rather a resting in; an opening up to; a giving over to God. It's a surrender, not a seeing. It's a surrender, not a touching or a hearing or a probing.

This past July, Bishop Hickey almost died. It scared him. It frightened him right to the marrow of his bones. What terrified him the most in one very, very dark night was what seemed to him to be the loss of his very faith. All that he had lived for, all that he had lived in, seemed in that dark hour to be gone. He found himself questioning everything; he doubted everything. He found joy in nothing.

We had a very agitated conversation the following day. He calmed when I told him that I wasn't surprised, because this is always typical of the great ones. And then he laughed.



Mike Mergen/Photo intern

Led by funeral director Kevin Halloran, Knights of Columbus pallbearers carry the coffin from the funeral.

But it's true. Many saints have written of it. For example, in the few months before she died, Therese of Lisieux experienced an absolute, complete loss of faith. "There is before me," she said, "a wall, a void which reaches from the earth to the heaven." One of the Carmelite sisters recalled a conversation on that Easter before she died. She said, "Therese asked me whether I sometimes had temptations against faith. I was surprised at her question, for at that time I was unaware of her trials."

On June 9, 1897, Therese herself wrote: "Never have I felt this before, how sweet and merciful the Lord really is, for he did not send me this trial until the moment I was capable of bearing it. A little earlier I believe I would have plunged into a state of discouragement. Now it is taking away everything that could be a natural satisfaction in my desire for heaven."

It is the final purification. It is the final invitation to trust the word of our God in all things, whether we feel it or not. Isn't that really at the very core of our faith that Jesus hanging on the cross prays the words of Psalm 22 with a loud and clear voice? "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning. O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; by night, and find no rest." This struggle of the final letting go, the finding of no joy left here, no sweetness left, no consolation waiting. And all that's really left is to place oneself in God's hands and to say even in the void, even in the blackness, even when I know not how or why, Father into your hands I give over my spirit.

Two days later Bishop Hickey was smiling. "It's (my trial of faith) all gone," he said. I suggested, "No, it's not; it'll probably be back."

We walk by faith and not by sight. Faith, the abiding trust and confidence in the one who loves us, whose word is trustworthy. Is never a grasping. Or a holding on. It is not a having. It's not a figuring out. It's a resting in; an opening to; a giving over to God.

We gather tonight in vigil. We gather tonight to commend our dear friend Dennis into the hands of a loving God who has promised the great ones like Dennis, and us as well, that when our earthly tent is destroyed, God will give us a glorious dwelling not made by human hands.

Paul tells us to console ourselves with this absolute abiding confidence. We live in this confidence. We die into this faith. It's all about the word. For the word of God has been spoken, and it will not return to God empty. May God bless us all with abiding Easter faith. Amen.

He lived through a lot of changes - but he himself did not change. He remained always the priest, always faithful to his calling. He was also a great confessor. A lot of the priests went to him for confession, because he was essentially what Jesus called us to be.

He was a marvelous reconciler. Reconciliation, you might say, was his hallmark. He was very conscious of the need for all of us to be reconcilers. That's what Christ was, and that's what Bishop Hickey was.

He was an extraordinarily holy priest and bishop. Now he knows what it's all about - the full revelation of all the mysteries. During his illness, he was on the cross. Now he's been taken down from that cross. Now he can do even more for us.

Bishop James M. Moynihan, of Syracuse; chancellor of the Diocese of Rochester 1966-74; former pastor, St. Joseph's Parish, Penfield

The more you were in conversation with him, the more you realized he knew. He was great with background in formation and had a wonderful sense of church.

Bishop Henry J. Mansell, Diocese of Buffalo

I knew him as a very warm and caring person - humble and self-effacing. He was a wonderful, behind-the-scenes source of strength and support for Bishop Sheen, Bishop Hogan and, in a special way, for Bishop Clark.

Bishop Howard J. Hubbard, Diocese of Albany

He was always very resourceful. You could also tell that he took a great deal of interest in the diocesan newspaper.

Bishop John R. McGann, Diocese of Rockville Centre

He was a very humble man, generous to all. He manifested the true meaning of following Christ in his priestly vocation so well.

Bishop Frank J. Harrison, retired, Diocese of Syracuse

He was a great help to us in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when we were reorganizing our Tribunal. I especially remember his gentleness and kindness.

Auxiliary Bishop Thomas J. Costello, Diocese of Syracuse

I admired him from a distance. He had a great reputation for loving his fellow priests, and extending himself to them.

Bishop Bishop Thomas V. Daily, Diocese of Brooklyn