

Impact lingers from passage in Isaiah

In the first lesson from the Eucharistic Liturgy for Monday of the fourth week of Lent we hear the following: "No longer shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or a man who does round out his full lifetime" (Isaiah 65). And in the opening prayer we ask: "May we, your church, grow in your life and continue to receive your help on earth."

When I prayed and heard these words with the people who celebrated the 6:30 a.m. Mass at Sacred Heart Cathedral today, I received them as a gift. They helped me to pray then, and have continued to nourish my prayer even as the day grows older.

Why? Because they took me back to Sunday evening to a Eucharistic Liturgy and social with the Newman Community at SUNY Geneseo and to special association with two people very important to the life of that community: Father Desmond O'Neill and John Rutigliano Jr. A word about each.

Desmond O'Neill died very suddenly late last week. That news is hard to bear for his friends at SUNY Geneseo where he served as sacramental minister. It is hard to bear for the people of St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Lucy, Leicester Retsof, whom he served as pastor. I know that the same sadness touches many others. Among them: the people of St. Boniface and St. Theodore parishes, Rochester; the people at Monroe Community Hospital, whom he served as chaplain; and the women and men who partnered with him in ministry. All of them found in this priest of the Archdiocese of Sidney, Australia, a love for God and neighbor and a joy in ministry that made a difference in their lives. Des brought hope and encouragement, he taught well and loved generously.

along the way



BY BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK

Now he's gone, and that makes a difference to us. Our faith tells us that he enjoys the fullness of the Risen One's promise to us, and we rejoice in that. But his absence hurts many of us. We might feel the hurt and/or express it in different ways. But the pain is felt by many and is very real.

It was good for me to pray with the community this morning because Isaiah reminds me that the fullness promised by God is not fully realized in us. People, like Des, whom we love very much, still die before they "round out full lifetimes." I know he had much more to give. I know that the people he served loved Des's ministry and wanted more. So did I. But the reading reminds me (all of us?) that we can not impose our pace or measure on God. Rather, ours is to ask God for the grace to read and appreciate this dark moment in the light of the Paschal Mystery.

John Rutigliano Jr. helps me to deal with my questions about Des' death. John reminds me that although not complete in us, the fullness promised by God is well begun among God's beloved people. John is 7 months old. Very early in his life, this beautiful little baby was discovered to have a heart condition that

would place him in great peril if not treated successfully.

His parents, John and DeeDee Casey Rutigliano, accepted this challenge with great faith and with a serenity that brought strength to the Newman Community. They, in turn, prayed with great love for young John and his parents, and for the medical personnel who cared for the little one.

For this reason, the words "no longer shall there be an infant who lives just a few days..." carry new meaning for me today. If you have read this far you probably understand why. I hope you do because I know I could spend several more hours trying to explain it in crystal clear fashion and still not succeed.

A quick postscript: No doubt adding to the significance of all of this for me is the fact that I have known DeeDee Casey Rutigliano since her Nazareth Academy days. She was one of those exuberant, outgoing kids whose very presence made me smile. One particular memory epitomizes the pleasure of knowing DeeDee in those years: She, a junior in formal gown, escorted me in my finery down the aisle for a Nazareth graduation at the Eastman Theatre. I laughed all the way down the aisle because DeeDee was filling me in on her life and times. It seemed the most natural thing in the world to me. And, as far as I ever knew, no one seemed to mind. You can imagine the joy it must have been to re-connect with her and her husband, John, and learn of their mature faith in very trying circumstances.

People such as Des and little John and those who love them teach me a lot about Lent and help me to prepare for Easter.

Peace to all.



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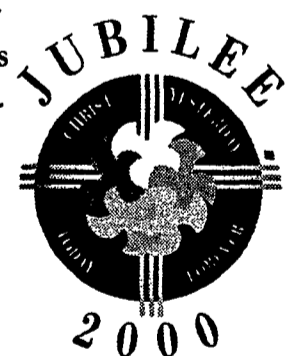
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