

In gratitude for Cardinal O'Connor's witness

We celebrated the Mass of Christian Burial for John Cardinal O'Connor today at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York. It was a rich experience for all present. In each of us who were privileged to be present, I am sure that the celebration stimulated many reflections, associations and memories. Some of mine follow:

1) I knew John J. O'Connor for almost 21 years, and can remember the first time I saw him and the last time I saw him. We first met at St. Peter's Basilica on May 26, 1979. We were there for rehearsals that evening with 24 other individuals who were to be ordained bishops in ceremonies the next day. I remember few details of the meeting, but I have always recalled John's joyful spirit on that occasion.

The last time I saw John was in January of this year when I went to New York City to join his friends in celebrating his 80th birthday. This we did at a Saturday-night banquet at a New York hotel and a Sunday Eucharistic Liturgy at St. Patrick's.

I wrote about those celebrations in "Along The Way" at the time and recall mentioning that I had rarely, if ever, seen the cardinal so peaceful, serene and relaxed. I remember that in particular because I could see how strongly the illness he suffered had ravaged his body. It was as though the physical assault he endured served to emphasize, to put in high profile, the peace of heart he clearly enjoyed.

He suffered much between that January time and May 3 when he died. I never saw him again, but my understanding is that he remained peaceful through it all — much to

along the way



BY BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK

the comfort and encouragement of those close to him.

2) Angelo Cardinal Sodano, Vatican secretary of state and Pope John Paul II's personal representative to the event, presided at today's liturgy. Cardinal Bernard Law, archbishop of Boston, preached the homily and Cardinal William Baum of the Vatican Curia offered a brief reflection after the Communion rite.

Cardinal Sodano conveyed the Holy Father's greetings to all at the beginning of the liturgy and spoke with obviously genuine gratitude for the many ways in which John O'Connor had offered his loyalty, support and advice to the Holy See during his tenure in New York.

Cardinals Law and Baum both let us know that John, in asking them to speak at this liturgy, gave them strict directions that they were to spend little time praising him and much time encouraging us to pray for his eternal rest. I cannot say that either of those gentlemen complied perfectly with their friend's direction. But I can say that both spoke beautifully and both, without a doubt, moved us to pray for our departed

brother.

Their comments about John's instructions to them got me thinking about a question I had never thought of before. I put it to you as it came to me: What would you like people to say about you at your funeral liturgy? What are the stories you'd like them to tell? The memories you would like them to share? Don't let the questions put you off. What they really do is invite us to think about the way we are living now, how pleased we may be with that and how we might take steps to deepen the quality of what we are about.

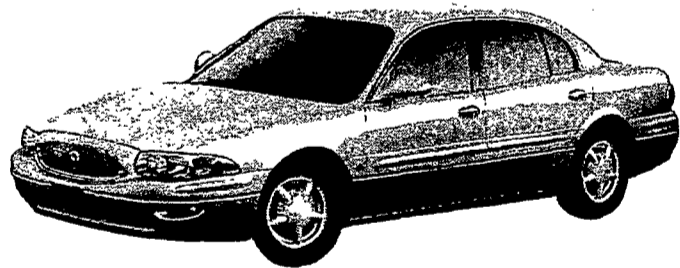
3) As often happens on such occasions I saw many old friends today — people like Bishop Henry Mansell, Sister Janet Baxendale, Bishop Howard Hubbard, Maria Guaracino and Bishop Jim Moynihan.

It was good to see them all, to share stories about Cardinal O'Connor, and to review all of the rumor and speculation concerning his successor.

As we told the stories and broke the bread today, I was aware of the beauty of the life we share in the Risen Christ. I am sure that you will understand it when I say that for all of its attendant sadness, the Mass of Christian Burial for John O'Connor was a source of joy for us. It was a reminder and pledge that all the good things God has begun in us through Christ will one day be brought to completion. I believe that that conviction was the sustaining power of John O'Connor's life and ministry. I thank him for that living witness and for his prayer for all of us today.

Peace to all.

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