

Homily: 'without love everything else crumbles'

EDITORS' NOTE: This is the advance text of the homily Bishop Matthew H. Clark delivered at the Aug. 31 funeral Mass for Bishop Joseph L. Hogan.

Our rites, our rituals, our great symbols and truth-bearing stories are precious treasures. They spark our understanding. They nourish our spirits. They help us to know ourselves and to discover one another. Such great elements of our tradition prod us to get beyond the urgent and the pressing, so that we can engage what is truly important. They remind us to connect the "now" with yesterday and tomorrow so we can be in touch with the timeless.

It is for such purposes as these that we gather in faith today. Some of them we hold deeply in common. Surely, we want to thank God for the life and ministry of our dear brother, Joseph Lloyd Hogan, to pray for his eternal rest with the Risen Christ and the great company of saints, to pray for one another in our loss, to understand and live more fully the saving mysteries we now celebrate and to draw strength for our continuing journey from word, sacrament and from the holiness of the assembly.

Our readings today contribute mightily to those purposes. No accident here when you consider that Joseph chose them. He was ever the teacher. They speak to us about life and love, living and dying and they offer us a perspective from which we can re-examine our priorities and order our service to others according to our gifts and their needs.

Jesus tells us in John's Gospel that, at the heart of it all, is the daily dying to self and rising to new life to which we are called. The lead image is the grain of wheat. Only if it falls into the ground and dies will there be a harvest. Farmers or not, we can understand that. And that understanding helps us bridge to the more personal things. I mean the harder parts about serving others and losing self, and following him along a road we might never have chosen for ourselves. The promise for those who follow is life and love beyond all imagining.

And if the promise gives heart for the journey, doesn't it bring consolation to know that its realization need not and cannot unfold all at once in any of us? Paul encourages the Corinthians to that line of thinking. We who are imperfect will be perfected. We who are adults will continue to put aside our childish ways. What we see now in blurred fashion, we will one day see with great clarity. It seems we can trust St. Paul's good counsel. Yes, it is true that he experienced a dramatic and profound initial conversion. But recall, too, Paul's references to the race, the fight, and the unnamed thorn in his flesh. It was never easy but he never lost hope. He kept at it always, even to the moment when he breathed his last. Can you find ongoing conversion here? Don't we need the encouragement of such witness from time to time?

When I hear these words, share your company and remember Joseph today, I experience enormous consolation. It helps me and, I hope, you as well to look at life in wider perspective and longer range, to locate everything that is human and real in a context of God's abiding love. When we do that the good times bear greater promise. The hard times, while we would never choose them, can become sources of life.

When we remember and celebrate our brother's life and ministry, we do so with our own memories of how he enriched us, how he made us better than we otherwise might have been. Some of those stories we can tell. Some we need to hold close to our hearts. But it is important that we tell all that we can so that we can continue to draw strength from his goodness.

I think of the night of my installation as Joseph's successor as your bishop. He told that great assembly that from then on I would have his love and support. I want you to know from my lips today that he was completely faithful to that promise. You can imagine what it meant to me to have his support and understanding when things were not going well or when there was a tough decision to be made. He had been there. He knew what it could be like. And he always said the equivalent of, "You're doing fine. Know that you have my support."

Would it not be wonderful if we had the time this morning for all of us to tell how Joseph touched our lives? How about Dan and Ruth, Mary



File photo
Bishop Joseph L. Hogan greets his successor, Bishop Matthew H. Clark, at the Rochester airport. At left is Auxiliary Bishop John E. McCafferty.



File photo
Bishop Clark greets Bishop Hogan during the Oct. 11, 1999, funeral Mass for Auxiliary Bishop Dennis W. Hickey.

Rose and Father Mike and all of his family. And the wonderful group of priest friends with whom Joseph met every Wednesday for 42 years? And the many loyal friends in whom he took such delight and who, in turn, supported him so generously? And how about the bishops here present who served with him prior to his retirement? Or the thousands of students whom he taught and parishioners he served through the years? Or the Sisters of St. Joseph and brother priests with whom he spent his final years?

Even since he died I have heard many of the stories. A woman from St. Patrick's, Victor, told me how important his friendship had always been and how, in a very difficult time in her life, his preaching had been of great help to her. A priest of our diocese spoke of his treasured friendship with Joseph that began in the late '40s when he was a 13-year-old student in Father Hogan's Latin class at St. Andrew's Seminary and continues on even now.

It is important that we hear these stories because they put us in touch with the Spirit who animated him and gave such a generous, selfless direction to his life. But we recognize that we, too, will one day come to the moment of passing to fullness of life. Then his name will live on not so much in the personal memories of those who shared his journey, but through his writing and his legacy of pastoral service.

That record is one of special distinction and will be seen to have been of critical importance to our diocese by those who write about us in future years. I will not go into detail because this is not the time for that and you know the story at least as well as I do. But I invite you to be in touch with your overarching view of his episcopal ministry as I offer you a summary of my own.

I think of it this way. Bishop Bernard J. McQuaid and the laity, religious and clergy of 1868 were the founding mothers and fathers of our diocese. They had a formidable task. But they had vision, faith and courage and did magnificent work, the fruits of which we enjoy to this day. I think of Bishop

Joseph Hogan, the laity, religious and clergy of this diocese as the mothers and fathers, the architects of our post-conciliar renewal. The challenge to understand, absorb and put into pastoral practice the insights of the Second Vatican Council was a massive one.

But that group of men and women, many of you among them, went at it with the faith, vision and courage remarkably like those of the pioneers of a century earlier. No less than they, Bishop Hogan and the wonderful people of this local church put down solid foundations of renewal. We still build on them today.

And so we continue, dear friends, trying as best we can to absorb and put into effective pastoral practice the insights developed by the church during and since Vatican Council II. It is an exciting and life-giving task. But we know that it is not always easy. Such tasks never have been. Think of St. Paul once again. He wrote the luminous classic on love we heard this morning to a community that was split because of competitive and contentious spirit. They so focused on their own gifts and plans that they forgot the greatest gifts of all and God's own plan for a holy people.

Could it be that Joseph, our friend, bishop, and teacher, chose this reading for our encouragement and instruction today? Yes, it is an act of gratitude and praise to accept and develop our God-given gifts — for our own growth and for the growth of the community. And so, we must form our strategies, develop our plans, work very hard and use our wits in every way possible to deepen the work of renewal and meet the pastoral challenges of today.

But through it all we need to love one another with the love described by St. Paul. He calls us to be patient and kind with one another. His exhortation calls us away from rudeness, self-seeking, anger and brooding over injury. He reminds us that putting on airs, being snobbish and jealous run counter to love.

Above all he wants us to remember that without love everything else crumbles. Our shrewdest insights, our most effective plans, even our most spectacular gifts are as nothing if they are not rooted in and expressed with love. But, if we do live in the love of Christ, if our relationships are rooted in that gift, then we can move to the future with confidence and joy. If we remain united in the love of Christ, we will survive the mistakes we will make, find the way again when we wander, and bind up the wounds when we hurt one another. We will have absolutely nothing to fear. We will be a confident, joyful, lively people.

In faith, Joseph was willing to become like the grain of wheat. In hope, he was willing freely to spend himself and be spent. And to the very end, he loved with generosity and integrity. Now, for him, it is all love and, sad as we are that he is gone, we can only rejoice in that.

May he rest in peace.

May we continue to live and grow together in peace.