

Funeral of Reverend Leonard M. Mullaney

December 18, 2014

Celebrant: Bishop Edgar M, d’Cunha, SDV

Homilist: Msgr. Barry W. Wall

Holy Name Church, Fall River, MA 02720

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We have all experienced the failure of electrical power; the radio falls silent the television screen goes blank and if it is night we are plunged into darkness. We are taken by surprise, we stumble around, we may be confused and frustrated and we reach out for any kind of light. The sudden death of a loved one can cause a similar reaction.

The disciples described in the gospel reading returning to Emmaus were reeling from the death of their teacher, Jesus of Nazareth. They had been hoping that he was the savior of Israel but now he was dead and they did not yet understand the meaning of the empty tomb. As they trudged home discouraged and confused they encountered an apparent stranger who was Jesus Himself and unburdening themselves to him they found light in their darkness and comfort and inspiration in his explanation of the word of God, of the scriptures which pertained to the dying and rising of the Messiah.

We gather today to celebrate this Funeral Mass for Leonard Michael Mullaney, son, brother, uncle, friend, priest. We are comforted by the words of the liturgy which remind us “for the faithful O Lord, life is not ended in death but merely changed,” changed into eternal life with the Risen Christ.

Born into a family of Faith Father Mullaney was the beneficiary of Catholic Education at Sacred Heart School here in his native Fall River and at Monsignor Coyle High School. As a student he was academically and athletically gifted and finishing high school he responded to a call to priestly ministry which he carried out for over fifty years in this local church.

The gospel reading of the recent Third Sunday of Advent spoke eloquently of John the Baptist. A man sent from God; he came to testify to the light, to Christ, the one among the people whom they did not recognize, the one whose sandal strap John professed he was not worthy to untie. To bear witness to the light is the call of every believer, but especially of the priest. Father Mullaney testified to the light, in preaching the word, in celebrating the sacraments, and in caring for God's people in Wareham, and Marion, in New Bedford and Taunton, at Cathedral Camp and as pastor in Assonet, East Falmouth, and Mattapoisett.

His convictions were firm, his devotion was solid, and his style could be called no frills; he was well known for being frugal

In the Catholic funeral we celebrate the mystery of the dying and rising of Jesus. Our participation in this saving mystery begins when we are born again in the waters of baptism. At a funeral we offer worship, and praise and thanksgiving to God for the gift of the life which has now been returned to God.

We come together to comfort with our presence and our prayer those who are in sorrow. We come thanking God for the good things he gave to Father Leonard Mullaney in this life and for the good things that he gave to others, things known best by his family, close friends and parishioners. We come to remember.

My reminiscence centers around the hospitality of Len's mother when we were seminarians and young priests. Judge Mullaney enjoyed a party and was a gracious hostess. I remember especially, gathering at their home following our ordination rehearsal. Father Mullaney made the ordination somewhat memorable, for eight days before the ordination, when we began our retreat Len went to the hospital for an emergency appendectomy. At his ordination he was unable kneel and was seated during much of the ceremony including the prostration during the Litany of the Saints.

Some memories are more recent. A few years ago I was in a doctor's office in New Bedford. The receptionist asked if I knew Father Mullaney. I said I knew him very well. She told me she formerly lived in Assonet and that when her husband spent several weeks recuperating from an automobile accident Father Mullaney visited him frequently. On his first visit when the motor cycle came roaring into the driveway her elderly mother in law went to the phone to call the police. she said the old lady was hard of hearing so as Father Mullaney came to the door the she was shouting, Grandma put the phone down, it's the priest; it's the priest!

Unfortunately Father Len's retirement in his beloved Westport Harbor was cut short by illness, and just as the quahogging season was beginning.

At the Catholic Memorial Home he became very interested in the history of the Home and its architecture especially the beautiful altar piece, the Last Supper carved in ivory. He contributed many articles to the in house newsletter. To help accomplish this he directed a small group of research assistants. One would hesitate to visit him unless you had some new item of information to bring to him. We always had something to talk about. Curiously he succeeded me twice in parish assignments, many years ago at Immaculate Conception in Taunton and more recently as pastor of St. Anthony's in Mattapoisett. We had a shared interest in those communities

Father Mullaney, Father Jack Andrews and I had the joy of celebrating our fiftieth anniversary of ordination together on February 2, 2012 in the St. Margaret Mary Chapel of the Home. Bishop Coleman was present with a few of our closest relatives and friends, Happily among them was Father Len's devoted brother- in- law, Jim Panos who was called home to the Lord several months later.

On November 16, I was asked to celebrate the Sunday Mass at the Catholic Memorial Home. Father Len concelebrated as usual. I think that will be my abiding memory, concelebrating that last Mass with him as we had concelebrated our very first Mass together.

May eternal rest be his in the presence of the Great High Priest.

