

Father Joseph C. Martin, S.S. – Mass of Resurrection

March 13, 2009

Basilica of the Assumption of Blessed Virgin Mary

408 North Charles Street, Baltimore, Maryland. 21201

Readings: Mass of Resurrection

Jeremiah 1:4-11

“Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you....”

St Paul to the Romans 14:7-12

“Both in life and in death we belong to God....”

St Luke 10:25-37

Parable of the Good Samaritan.

Homily

Members of the hierarchy, brother priests, especially Sulpician Fathers;

members of the Martin and Abraham families;

all who came to St Mary’s Seminary yesterday; all those from around the country, and the world who sent words of condolence these past few days:

all of us express our profound sympathy to the members of the Martin and Abraham families on their loss of such a great man.

It is an honor for me to speak this morning on the life, and ministry of Fr. Joseph Martin...not an easy task. But Joe Martin was never an easy act to follow.

Fr. Martin was ordained in this very church, May 22, 1948, a young man of 24. His ordination marked his *first surrender to life on life’s terms*, and thus began a spiritual journey “beyond his wildest dreams!”

Joe and I visited this beautifully restored Basilica last year. He said to me, “David, when I’m carried in, just tell them...more than anything else that has come my way, tell them I loved being a priest. I’ve had more than my share of accolades.”

I assured him I would share this with you today.

Fr. Martin, a priest to the end, ministering as late as last week with smiles and kind words to those receiving dialysis along with him. A gifted teacher, a skilled humorist, a master storyteller with a story for every occasion...and then some! A compassionate, kind and gentle man, the dearest of friends, a Good Samaritan in the richest sense of the word. I'd venture to say Joe Martin was one of those unique individuals who had only friends....

Yet it was none of his strengths that led Fr. Martin to his greatest ministry, but rather his personal weakness. He was a "wounded healer" which enabled him to exercise a special ministry in dealing with alcoholics and addicts.

I came to know Joe Martin when I was associate pastor at St. William of York in West Baltimore in the late sixties. Joe was on the faculty of old St. Charles College in Catonsville and celebrated weekend Masses at St. William's. The people loved him – short homilies, always a joke that left his listeners smiling. No one would have dreamed, that underneath his light-heartedness, Joe struggled with the demons of addiction and depression.

Ten years after his ordination date, Fr. Martin would make a *second surrender* and enter Guest House in Lake Orion, Michigan at the request of his Sulpician superior.

At Guest House, Joe became a friend of Austin Ripley, its founder. Ripley became the motivating force in his recovery, the day Ripley told Joe "Good things will happen in your life Joe Martin; you'll do what Popes and Bishops cannot."

At Guest House, Joe rediscovered his priesthood. He learned that his gift of humor would open a new ministry, offering a way up and a way out for God's broken people. Joe saw that the disease of addiction was a God given blessing.

In our first reading: God spoke to Jeremiah,
"Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you,

before you were born I consecrated you and appointed you a prophet to the nations...."

And Jeremiah, despite his youth and inexperience, would then stand and announce to an exiled people a covenant of hope where FEAR would be no more.

In God's time, a more seasoned Joe Martin, would stand with the broken and exiled alcoholic and drug addict, and share his experience, strength and hope.
FEAR would be no more!

His reflections on his Guest House Experience, led to his "*Chalk Talk on Alcohol*" which catapulted him into the national spotlight.
Fr. Martin's living legacy had begun!

In the late seventies, returning to Baltimore after a talk in North Carolina, Joe was chatting with Mae Abraham, on the plane. Mae said "Father why don't we build a treatment center where everything you stand for can go on; where others can receive what you got at Guest house."
A graced moment -- and in God's time, Ashley, which was Mae's maiden name, came to be.

But not without hard work and a lot of prayers; not without many disappointments along the way; but always with the total commitment of Mae and Tommy Abraham and the generous contributions of those who believed in him. Joe would be first to tell you "I could not do it alone."

Through it all, Joe would often ask himself the question he once asked Austin Ripley: "So how far do you go to help the alcoholic and drug addict?"

Joe was quick to recall Rip's response: "Go as far as you can, and then... one step more." "One Step More" would later become the title of Joe's biography recalling the founding of Ashley.

January 17, 1983, with the leadership of Rev. Leonard Dahl, Ashley opened its doors to five patients. From that day on Fr. Martin greeted every patient who entered Ashley with the words: "Welcome to Ashley. The nightmare is over."

Now in its twenty-sixth year Ashley continues to grow, with the leadership of Fr. Mark Hushen, O.S.F.S.

More recently, with his health declining, I saw Joe find his spot in the dining room right inside the door. Patients -- young adults and seniors, rich and poor, the down and out -- would meet him and say: "Thank you Fr. Martin, for saving my life."

And Joe, never too tired to listen, would remind each one that the life of every human being was no mistake; that God has wonderful plans for them. I'd see them leave his company with a new awareness: that their life could be happy, joyous and free!

Early Monday morning, after a long illness, Joe Martin made his *final surrender to God's will* and died in his sleep at home. For Joe Martin, Ashley's logo, "*through death to life*," has come full circle.

Fr. Martin leaves a rich spiritual legacy. He lives on in the "*Chalk Talk*" and on videos and CD's; he lives on in Ashley, which for years to come will owe a permanent gratitude for his vision and hard work; but most of all he lives on in the hearts and minds of the thousands and thousands and thousands of people who marvel at their own recovery.

Fr. Martin used to choke up easily; as easily as he could tell a joke. I know he choked up this morning and his eyes filled with happy tears...and he's saying in his inimitable style "not too bad for a little guy from Hamden. All I ever wanted to do was fix a few drunks."

He did indeed!

May his great soul rest in peace!

Fr. David M Carey