

Homily From Funeral Mass for Br. Daniel Jerome Stang, osc

Homily given by Fr. Kermit Holl, osc, filial prior of the Crosier Community of Onamia

We each can decide whether we think that the synopsis on the memorial card for Br. Daniel of the long and dramatic Gospel story of the raising of Lazarus we've just heard is worthy of its attempt—namely, "Jesus said, "Remove the stone. You will see the glory of God. Unbind him and let him go free." I happen to think that it is pretty good; after all, I penned it! But I think also that its sentiments are in so many ways an apt synopsis of Br. Dan's life and faith and hopes and challenges as we all witnessed them in some degree over the years whether as family members or in our religious community.

In the Gospel, Lazarus' new life begins when Jesus stands before his tomb and says, "Remove the stone." While oftentimes this is a rather glided-over phrase of the story, as it comes today bearing considerations regarding the Light of Christ in Br. Dan's life, this simple phrase becomes instead an articulation of a reality far more weighty. Indeed, as one looks across the 91-year-long horizon of Br. Dan's life, he seems to have been personally weighed down and boxed in by stones more than many others we know have been. There was a restlessness within him; a struggle; an opposing force that he always seemed to run into.

Whatever its cause, whether childhood struggles, some personality deficiency, or the burden of shame that could cling to him like a wet cloak, Br. Dan knew what it was to be entombed even as he yet pushed always to seek more enlightenment. Yet he could never succeed by himself in getting rid of the stone that blocked him, however hard he tried. Only the Lord could "remove a stone," and there were times and turns when Br. Dan knew this divine gift truly. Unquestionably there were days and places and spans of time where he walked about like every other person alive, and yet so often soon-enough, Dan would then suddenly be stuck again behind some weighty stone that could close him in and bind him tight. These times were sad to see, and it was especially sad to see when he would roll the stone in front of such a "tomb" for himself. And we'd wonder, "Why?" but there was a part of Br. Dan that was innately weighed down and was left to wrestle with that struggle all his life. We certainly saw it in his life in our Order.

I do wonder whether Br. Dan ever knew that he shared such a burden with the Greek figure of Sisyphus whose own hell was a rock rolling back down upon him every time he neared the hilltop ready to push it over. Except, precisely to this point, Br. Dan actually had, thanks be to God, more in common with Lazarus than with the condemned king Sisyphus of ancient Corinth, for, unlike Sisyphus whose task was eternal futility, Br. Dan had the grace of Jesus Christ born to him in baptism to free him from such unending damnation. Indeed for Br. Dan, the grace of God's love poured out on him in Christ Jesus was the power that could free him—that could "unbind him and let him go free," as Jesus said exactly to the crowd outside Lazarus' tomb at Bethany. Thankfully, Br. Dan knew this glorious side of faith and life very well, also. He knew what it was to "Praise the Lord!" for such a gift; he knew the amazing grace that saves "wretches" and us all; he knew real gratitude and joy and love whenever they could break through or take root within his intense life and spiritual experiences.

Indeed, the first two scriptures that Br. Dan picked for our use today speak clearly to this. In the Song of Songs, he could identify with the one who sought "the other whose heart he loved," even as he could not find that One always so easily. "And so he roamed the streets and crossings, and when he could find that One whom his heart loved, he would take hold and not let go"—until some other interior impulse would turn him elsewhere to begin the process anew once more. (Of course, every life is such a searching process for each of us across the span of our days, but the cycle of "finding" and "letting go" was so often on overdrive in Br. Dan so much of the time from feast to famine, from confidence to despair, from healing to shame.)

Yet he knew in his heart, as well--which is why we heard from the First Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians—Br. Dan knew that he—even he—was a temple of God and that God desired to (and did) dwell in him. He knew that he too was meant to be included in this glory of God.

As Br. Dan's last religious superior, I had many conversations with him about feeling loved, feeling dismissed, feeling confident or feeling worthless. Yet with work and patience and drive and faith over the years, he lived ever more into the fullness of Lazarus' story—so much so that even his quarantine in long-term care across the way at Mille Lacs Health System the past three months was no longer enough to roll a stone across his life as it might have years ago. Instead, Br. Dan had found a certain sense of peace and contentment finally just having to "be," only being able to "be," as he entered old age and a new phase of physical limitation. Though each "letting go" was challenging for him—ending ministries beyond the filial priory, driving, the ability to work and finally even his physical balance—Br. Dan developed the grace to accept each loss still a disciple of the Lord and not again a man entombed. What a blessing.

And so, my sisters and brothers, as each of us in our own way watched this progression in Br. Dan's life, I would hope that, not unlike the life of Lazarus we heard in the Gospel today, I would hope that in the story of Br. Daniel Stang, osc, we can see some "glory of God" is left behind. He was a very hard worker. He loved to befriend people and be an offering of compassion to them. He loved his family. He hungered to know what heaven is like. And now he is truly at peace—a peace that the world could not give, but a fullness and a healing and a love in his new life that roll away the stone and let him walk freely—maybe even dance freely—forever in Paradise, for there he is just another soul saved, no longer unlike anyone else.

May God bless him in this new and eternal joy of the Kingdom of God. Godspeed, our dear Br. Daniel. We will see you again one day.