

Homily From Funeral Mass for Fr. John Peter Christ, osc

Homily given by Fr. Tom Enneking, osc, conventual prior of the Conventual Priory of the Holy Cross

On March 8 of last year, Pope Francis published an Apostolic Letter on the 150th anniversary of the proclamation of St. Joseph as Patron of the Universal Church. The letter is titled, "*Patris Corde*," "with a father's heart." In the letter, Pope Francis names and reflects on seven qualities of St. Joseph that I would like to use as we give thanks for the ways that Fr. John revealed the love of God to us throughout his life.

A beloved father. Pope Francis reflects on the many ways our faith community expresses its love and affection for St. Joseph, calling to mind the story of his ancestor, Joseph, in Egypt and Pharaoh telling people during the time of famine, "Go to Joseph." Fr. John was a beloved father for many of us. He was approachable, pastoral and responsive. He would bend over backward to help people out, especially in such things as marriage cases and annulments.

A tender and loving father. Pope Francis reflects on St. Joseph's ability to look upon weakness with tender mercy. Fr. John was a master of speaking the truth that does not condemn but welcomes, embraces, sustains and forgives. He had a heart for the homeless, recognizing the divine presence in every person who came to him for help, even to the point of opening his home to let people take a shower, something that made more than a few of us a bit nervous. He was known to end the various prayers at Mass with "God in love with us", a reflection that Fr. John loved God and God loved Fr. John.

An obedient father. Pope Francis reflects on St. Joseph's obedience to God by acting upon what was revealed to him in four different dreams. Fr. John shared the dreams of Vatican II and was obedient to them. He worked tirelessly to foster the liturgical life of the Church, paying attention to all the senses in order to make the Mass and sacraments moments of encounter with Christ. He had a great pastoral concern to help adult Catholic people think through their faith life with a deep honor of their own minds and their responsible thought

processes. He believed in a central leadership role for the laity in the life of the Church. Having had older sisters in "abundance" and in times when women needed to work around the system to secure those rights, he championed them as God champions all who seek truth, equality and the light of love.

An accepting father. Pope Francis ponders St. Joseph's capacity to accept things while not understanding the meaning of things that happen. He was reconciled with his own history. Fr. John also was an accepting person expressed in his gift to listen to others. He lived a spirit of welcome and hospitality, insisting on tablecloths and flowers when meals were served to the homeless. He was firm in times of difficulties and constant in doing good. Fr. John saw the beauty of God in the many peoples and cultures of the world. The Vietnamese community at St. Dennis knew that he loved them and appreciated the beauty of their culture, traditions and faith.

A creatively courageous father. Pope Francis explores St. Joseph's capacity to create a home in a stable for Christ to be born and negotiating the migrant experience of having to flee to Egypt. We are very aware of Fr. John's creative nature. He loved flowers, art, music – and the flowers had to be in just the right spot; pictures had to be move one inch to the right or left when being hung, and he insisted on having the correct radio station tuned in for classical music.

A working father. Pope Francis references St. Joseph's trade as a carpenter and how his example shows us that work is a way for us to participate in the work of salvation, putting our gifts at the service of others. Fr. John was not afraid to work. He told me once that he only needed four hours of sleep to function – I could never keep up with him!

A father in the shadows. Pope Francis references a book by the Polish writer Jan Dobraczynski titled, "The Shadow of the Father" that tells the story of St. Joseph's life in the form of a novel. The pope draws on the evocative image of a shadow as a way to think of St. Joseph being the shadow of God watching over and protecting the child Jesus. Fr. John was this kind of presence in people's lives. While he listened attentively to people and their stories, he also introduced them to life and reality. He formed people to decide for themselves,

enjoy freedom and explore new dimensions of life. He was a shadow of God, enabling and encouraging others to come to know the God who loved them that they might love God in return.

On behalf of the Crosiers, I wish to express my deep gratitude for all of you who have walked with Fr. John and shared in his life since he retired and moved back to his beloved home here. I am grateful to Fr. Thaddeus who allowed Fr. John to continue serving as he aged. I am deeply grateful for all the care and attention provided by Ruth and members of Fr. John's family during his final days. May his life as a beloved, tender and love, obedient, accepting, creatively courageous, working, and shadowing father comfort us in our sorrow and inspire to be the same with those we encounter in our lives.