

The Way, The Life, The Truth

Homily for the Vigil of Fr. Tom Kuykendall, Pastor of St. Joseph Catholic Church,
Wenatchee Washington

Most Reverend Joseph J. Tyson, Bishop of Yakima

Peace be with you! Friends we begin our final prayers for Fr. Tom Kuykendall this night. We term this evening service a “vigil” because with our prayers we usher Fr. Tom back to Jesus who marks the journey of all of our lives as “...the way, the truth and the life...”

I want to begin by acknowledging and thanking Fr. Richard Keolker, one of our Yakima priests and a long time friend of Fr. Tom who shared with us some beautiful reflections in English and will do the same tomorrow at the funeral Mass. I also want to thank all of you – Spanish-speaking parishioners – here at St. Joseph Parish in Wenatchee who have accompanied Fr. Tom in so many ways through your presence and your prayers.

Indeed, tonight is all about prayer. We term this service tonight a “vigil” precisely because it marks the final “vigil” of prayer for Fr. Tom. This final vigil became evident and real to me on Pentecost. Pentecost Sunday was the day Fr. Tom planned on coming home – meaning to the rectory – for his final bit of care before death. When I talked with him on Saturday, he told me the doctors only gave him a few days to live and that he wanted to die at home – in the rectory – so this Pentecost Sunday he was planning to come home.

I showed up at his hospital room early Sunday morning of Pentecost trying to aim my visit before his mid-morning departure. Luann and Carol from the parish staff were there. The three of us celebrated a final Mass with him barely conscious. We knew he would not be going home to the rectory. Death was too close. He died about two hours. Home, as it turned out, would be God.

Saturday – the day before Pentecost – I told him that my hope and prayer in his final days is that he would know of the gratitude both Bishop Sevilla and I had for his priestly service and that he would trust and even relax in the abundant mercy of God.

As fifth century St. Augustine notes, when Jesus declares himself as “...the way the truth and the life....” Jesus means that it is through a personal encounter with him that men and women gain God’s hospitable mercy. “To me they come, in me they rest,” notes St. Augustine.

So friends, let us walk these final steps as we reverence and bless Fr. Tom’s body preparing him for burial with our prayers. May we take hope in Jesus who prepares a place for each and every one of us who acknowledge him as the “...way, the truth and the life....” Peace be with you.