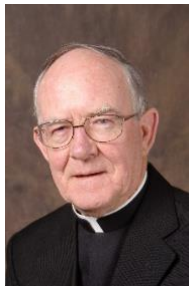


+Fr. Larry Reilly



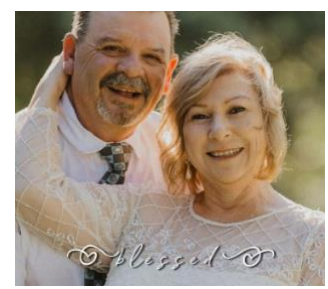
+Fr. John Murtagh



+Fr. Maurie Peterson



+Mrs. Gayle (+Ray) Miller



+Dcn. Speedy (Nena) Gonzalez

Our Home in Heaven

Homily for Deceased Clergy Mass, St. Paul Cathedral, November 21, 2023

Msgr. Robert Siler

(Updated Nov. 23, 2023 to correct the final resting place chosen by Fr. Richard House).

Bishop Tyson, brother priests and deacons, deacon spouses, my dear friends. Permit me a few brief comments in Spanish to begin:

En el Cementerio Calvario aquí en Yakima, hay una sección para los sacerdotes y obispos de esta diócesis. Un obispo, Rvdmo. José Dougherty, está enterrado allí, y algunos sacerdotes también. Muchos otros sacerdotes están enterrados en otros lugares, cerca de sus familiares, o en parroquias donde servían. El cementerio, por supuesto, es normalmente la casa para nuestros cuerpos antes del Día del Juicio.

En esta sección del Cementerio Calvario, hay tres monumentos. En el centro, una estatua de la Virgen María, Madre de Sacerdotes. A la derecha, un monumento con figuras de un cáliz y una hostia, que representan el don de la Eucaristía recibido por los sacerdotes. A la izquierda, un nuevo monumento de Santa María Goretti, una joven de Italia quien murió después de ser atacado por motivos sexuales. Antes de su muerte, en el hospital, ella perdonó al atacante. Él se convirtió en la prisión, y estuvo presente en el día de su canonización como Santa.

En este monumento es una oración: "Que las oraciones de la Santa María Goretti ayuden llevar curación y paz a todos las víctimas y sobrevivientes del abuso sexual en la Diócesis de Yakima, los Estados Unidos, y en todo el mundo."

Este puede ser nuestra oración también.

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"Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you
and utter every kind of evil against you falsely because of me.

Rejoice and be glad,
for your reward will be great in heaven.”

These closing lines of the Gospel brings to my mind the word “home” – and more precisely our heavenly home.

I have been thinking a bit of the church homes I have shared with the clergy who have died the past year and a half or so. I had the blessing of being assisted for a couple of years at the Easter Vigil in Warden by Deacon Agapito “Speedy” Gonzalez, including a month or so before his death in May of 2022. He sang the Exsultet in Spanish with enthusiasm. I fondly remember Gayle Miller, whom I can’t really speak of apart from the late Deacon Ray. Gayle served as our vice chancellor for years and with Ray was so kind to the bishops, priests, deacons and deacons’ wives of this diocese. Gayle and Ray welcomed me to the Cathedral as my new home parish 16 years ago. She died in July 2022.

St. Andrew Parish in Ellensburg was my home as pastor for five years. Fr. Maurie Peterson, who retired there with an arthritic back condition, found quiet ways to contribute, including making a tasty pasta salad for our funeral luncheons. Fr. John Murtagh, a pastor’s pastor, served there before he came to Holy Family. “Fr. Murtagh was my favorite pastor, Fr. Siler, but you’re second,” a parishioner told me once. Fr. Larry Reilly served the Upper County during my time at St. Andrew. We helped each other care for our flocks, whichever pasture they decided they liked to graze in better.

I haven’t come to praise them, really, but to note their passing, and to join you in praying for them, that they will be at peace and be at home with the Lord.

I should note that I did make a trip to the priest’s plot at Calvary Cemetery today, where according to my most recent will, my earthly remains will be at home. None of three priests I just mentioned are buried there. Our last burial at the priest plot was five years ago – Fr. Tom Lane, who is buried next to Fr. Ron Patnode, who is buried next to Fr. Gary Desharnais – to name another three. There is lots of room, there, brothers. At the proper time. There also is a beautiful statue of the Blessed Mother, and on the right side, a memorial marker provided by Fr. John O’Shea featuring a chalice and host. In this Year of the Eucharist, during this Eucharist, which means Thanksgiving – indeed just two days before our national day of Thanksgiving – we can give thanks for the ministry of our deceased priests, and our deceased deacons, who were supported by their wives – and again, pray that they be at home with God.

Certainly home has many meanings. Fr. Reilly, who grew up in the Tri Cities, is buried in Richland, as is Msgr. William Sweeney, and Fr. Richard Wuertz. Fr. Murtagh is buried in the Cemetery of St. Attracta’s Church in County Sligo, Ireland, his homeland. Or the Holy Land, if

you're Irish. Fr. Peterson is buried at Holy Cross Cemetery in Ellensburg, along with Msgr. Joseph Luyten and Fr. Joseph Graaff. and Fr. Richard House chose the cemetery in Ephrata, near St. Rose of Lima Parish. All these men desired to be buried where they grew up, or near parishes where they felt most at home. I believe each of our Catholic cemeteries has at least one priest.

Perhaps the Priests Plot at Calvary is something like the place mentioned in the Robert Frost poem, "The Death of the Hired Man." A farmer, Warren, is sitting on the porch steps talking to his wife, Mary, about Silas, an old field worker who had abandoned the farm during the previous year's haying. He had returned. Mary had talked to Silas a bit, got him settled next to a warm fire, and then was talking to Warren about second chances. At one point she suggests that he has "come home to die." He responds a bit derisively,

'Home is the place where, when you have to go there,

They have to take you in.'

Before I share Mary's response, let me ask a question: When we have been hurt – persecuted and insulted and been the subject of false statements in this instance – can we forgive? How can we rejoice and be glad, and expect a heavenly reward – a reward that in this context likely means eternal life?

Pope Francis, in his Apostolic Exhortation "Gaudete et Exsultate," "Rejoice and be Glad," invites us to reflect deeply on the Beatitudes as we seek to live saintly lives, to grow in holiness as we cooperate with God's grace, preparing ourselves for our heavenly homeland. A few of his thoughts on this final Beatitude:

"90. Jesus himself warns us that the path he proposes goes against the flow, even making us challenge society by the way we live and, as a result, becoming a nuisance.

"91. In living the Gospel, we cannot expect that everything will be easy, for the thirst for power and worldly interests often stands in our way.

"92. Whatever weariness and pain we may experience in living the commandment of love and following the way of justice, the cross remains the source of our growth and sanctification."

And, with a little bit of a corrective:

"93. Here we are speaking about inevitable persecution, not the kind of persecution we might bring upon ourselves by our mistreatment of others.

“94. Persecutions are not a reality of the past, for today too we experience them, whether by the shedding of blood, as is the case with so many contemporary martyrs, or by more subtle means, by slander and lies. ... He concludes:

“Accepting daily the path of the Gospel, even though it may cause us problems: that is holiness.”

Perhaps at our clergy dinner tonight we can spend some time reminiscing about how the brothers and sisters that have gone before us were able to live out this Beatitude – and all the others – as they grew in holiness and modeled Christ for us.

But what about forgiveness? Here again I would uplift some thoughts from Pope Francis, this time from his Apostolic Exhortation, “Amoris Laetitia,” “The Joy of Love.”

“106. When we have been offended or let down, forgiveness is possible and desirable, but no one can say that it is easy. The truth is that (quoting from St. John Paul II) ‘family communion can only be preserved and perfected through a great spirit of sacrifice. It requires, in fact, a ready and generous openness of each and all to understanding, to forbearance, to pardon, to reconciliation. There is no family that does not know how selfishness, discord, tension and conflict violently attack and at times mortally wound its own communion.’” I think we could say the same of our diocesan family and relationships.

In paragraph 107 the Holy Father notes this:

“107. Today we recognize that being able to forgive others implies the liberating experience of understanding and forgiving ourselves. Often our mistakes, or criticism we have received from loved ones, can lead to a loss of self-esteem. We become distant from others, avoiding affection and fearful in our interpersonal relationships. Blaming others becomes falsely reassuring. We need to learn to pray over our past history, to accept ourselves, to learn how to live with our limitations, and even to forgive ourselves, in order to have this same attitude towards others.”

Before I read the final paragraph, 108, Let’s briefly go back to Warren and Mary, talking about Silas coming home to die. Warren says, derisively,

“‘Home is the place where, when you have to go there,

They have to take you in.’

And Mary responds:

‘I should have called it

Something you somehow haven’t to deserve.’ Back to Pope Francis:

“108. All this assumes that we ourselves have had the experience of being forgiven by God, justified by his grace and not by our own merits. We have known a love that is prior to any of our own efforts, a love that constantly opens doors, promotes and encourages. If we accept that God’s love is unconditional, that the Father’s love cannot be bought or sold, then we will become capable of showing boundless love and forgiving others even if they have wronged us.”

This is not easy. But wouldn’t our lives be better – as persons, as a presbyterate, as a diaconate community, as a diocese, as the Catholic Church in the U.S., as a nation – if we could find ways to truly accept God’s grace, forgive ourselves, and forgive one another? Surely we would be more at peace – at home – within ourselves. Not to earn our way into heaven, as a reward, but with the assurance that our hope for eternal life is not in vain. And that as we grow in holiness, we someday will hear Jesus say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

I mentioned two of the monuments at Calvary. There is a third now, that Bishop Tyson blessed on All Souls Day. A marker dedicated to Saint Maria Goretti, a young Italian girl who died after fending off a brutal attempted sexual assault. On her death bed she forgave the young man who attacked her. He underwent a conversion in prison, eventually was paroled, and attended her canonization Mass.

So, I will ask you tonight to join me tonight in praying for three men who also died in the past couple of years, former priests of the diocese, who did many good things as priests, but whose names are on our list of those credibly accused of sexual abuse: Peter Hagel. Richard Scully. And most recently, Christopher Breen. We certainly have judged their sins and crimes, really, to be terrible. But only God truly knew the state of their souls at the hour of their deaths. If you find you can’t pray for them, perhaps you can pray for the grace to be able to pray for them. Or to pray for the grace, to be able to pray for the grace, to be able to pray for them.

Hopefully, at least, we all can willingly join in the prayer that is included on our new monument: “May the prayers of Saint Maria Goretti help bring healing and peace to all victims of sexual abuse in the Diocese of Yakima, the United States, and throughout the world.”

And in the words of Saint Benedict:

“May our Lord Jesus Christ bring us all together to everlasting life.”

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