

MIDWEST – MIDWEEK

Brothers of Holy Cross – Midwest Province - P.O. Box 460 – Notre Dame, Indiana 46556-0460

July 11, 2018

Eulogy for
Br. JOHN MAY, C.S.C.

July 7, 2018

By
Br. Joe McTaggart, C.S.C.

**The situation I am now in
has been given to change me,
if I will only surrender completely to the reality
as it is given to me by God
and no longer seek
in any way to avoid it,
even by interior reservations.**

(from Thomas Merton)

This is a eulogy, a good word—a good word for our friend, colleague, and Brother, John Leo May, C.S.C.

Who could ever capture in such a brief time, or even choice words and grand memories, the totality of the life of a person? I certainly can't, no one can, but we make the attempt out of love and modesty anyway. It is a privilege for me to make the attempt.

Many years ago there was a popular hymn used in liturgy and religious ceremonies from the monks at Weston Priority. Part of it went like this:

When the time for our particular sunset comes, our “thing” our accomplishment really won't matter a great deal. But the clarity and care with which we have loved others, will speak with vitality of the great gift of life that we have been for each other.

There were phrases back in the seventies and eighties of people doing their own “thing.”



The word wasn't necessarily pejorative, but it did carry a sense that we, each of us, is called upon to offer society our own unique contribution, our "thing" in a sense. But the monks would have us believe that we are far, far more than the sum of our accomplishments or talents, better than our "thing, in other words, much better.

John May certainly had talent and many accomplishments. That's how he loved. And that's how he showed his love—in action using his skill and talents.

John was a quiet man, a competent man, a man of few words, but, oh, how exact, precise, and definitive those words were when he spoke.

He had a memory "like an elephant," if elephants have memories like that. But the idiom still holds. John could quote, off the top of his head, details, dates, and precise decisions which were made in community years ago. And there it was—exact, fact-checked before "fact checking" even existed in our vocabulary. Still, John was not arrogant with such facts or disputed details—just correct.

John had other skills and talents as well: music, his beloved music, singing, bookkeeping, art sensitivity and details, always details, always precise, even poetic.

In perhaps his most significant work and contribution, John was central to the founding of the Village. If the concept and construction of the Village was William Geenan's, and its philosophy of "brotherhood" and "neighborhood" Philip Armstrong's, then the backbone and inner structure of all that was John May's contribution--from the naming of the streets, and setting up phone numbers and room numbers to the working with the design of the chapel windows, from meticulous beauty to detailed spread sheets, John produced, John monitored, John proof-read.

John May loved by doing, loved by servicing, loved by his focusing on the tasks at hand.

Beyond talent and skill, though, there is soul. Beyond human success and achievement there is the animating grace of God itself—in our very souls, that part in all of us, the hidden part, the part capable of the deepest hearing of God in our lives. Yes, beyond skill is soul and soul ultimately makes itself known explicitly, sooner or later.

Merton told us what might elicit or prompt an absolute reliance on soul. "*The situation I am in has been given to change me if I will only surrender completely to*

the reality as it is given to me by God.”

There, I propose, is where John most explicitly showed his grace and his patience, his dependence on God’s will, and his humility way beyond his “thing,” skill, or talent. And it was a powerful witness.

As his medical condition, the givens in his life, increased in number and intensity, the Myasthenia Gravis, got worse. It is characterized by weakness and rapid fatigue of any muscle under one’s voluntary control. It got worse. He lost control. And for John those deficits increased considerably over these last years. And still he was graceful. Still he adjusted. Still he did not rail against those facts. He respected them.

Most importantly, there was never a word of complaint. I never heard John grumble about his condition, nor of the crosses he had to bear because of it. Not once. His condition forced many needs of dependency. Needs, yes. Complaints, no! “My strength is made perfect in weakness,” we are told. And John’s attitude, comportment, and his very self, proved that.

The evidence was manifest in the declining years of John May’s life. In the very Village he helped become a reality, he lived a good chunk of that time in infirmity—flat on his back. Never flat on his spirit. In all that long and trying time, his spirit of acceptance was consistent. It was not diminished or overcome by dis-ease. He accepted the confusing, confounding, many times inexplicable “will of God” as the dictum encourages.

John, your faithful and powerful witness for all of us in that acceptance was loud and clear. Infirmity will come to all of us, the way of all flesh. Yours came early, John, ours will come too. May we have your same grace.

But his care, his care as God would have it, came from the Village, the place he contributed so very much of his skill and talent in ministry. And the Village was there for John in the time of his own need. It came from his Holy Cross Brothers and larger Holy Cross community; from his cherished staff, fellow residents, and medical attendants. His doctors—Reidy, Danahey, Ruckersfeldt; his special caretakers: Chantal, Obie, Diane Grounds; his friends: Dan Kane, Robert Berthiaume, and Donald Bailer to name but a few. They were with John through it all—Donald Bailer cheering him on from the other side.

Most central to his support, though, was Loretta, his bedrock, his loadstar, and best friend, his faithful biological sister as kin/and Religious Sister as cohort and colleague. She too is cut from the same cloth, a perfect fit.

In the final analysis, talent and all, perhaps the most powerful image John May gifted us with is what we might call the old-fashioned virtue of “long suffering”...not the morbid bearing of it all, as we heard in the past, but the grace under pressure, the gentleness of his very self, his best self. He showed us that tough times and struggle are not the final word. God’s life within, that which we have honed and built faithfully over the years will be there to sustain, embrace, and protect us in times of need. We need to cultivate that, continually.

And we simply don’t know why some have to go through so much. That eternal question will loom forever. The answer eludes us. We can’t know the “why’s,” only the “how’s,” how to get through it all—how to carry our infirmities, our cross.

John’s quiet, unpretentious and unassuming witness showed us how to do that, how to buck up under the strain, how to never lose faith. It is after all, the very calling of our Congregation—the oft’ repeated but maybe seldom internalized—“the Cross our Only Hope.”

Through it all, true to himself, John never lost his wit. “So they have to feed you, John?” I said during a visit to the hospital before he rallied yet one more time to show us it is God who is in charge, not others’ predictions.

“They feed you, John?” (Long pause, eyes closed, unable to turn in the bed, all the previously mentioned infirmities there in full display)

”Yes. I am fed.” (And then, after another long pause)

”They shovel it in.”

I laughed. I laughed whole heartedly at the irony of it all, at the incredible folly and fragility of human nature at times. And then I quickly thought—Well, maybe a volunteer who fed him might have been in a hurry.

I was imagining too the indignity of it all, wondering whether I, myself, would have such patience in having to be fed and thinking mainly of the humility and surrendered acceptance John always exhibited. Always.

No built up anger or frustration was ever expressed about “the why” of his condition, just a slightly ironic, but mainly realistic—yes. “Here I am Lord; I come to do your will.” And “My strength is made perfect in weakness.”

And, above all, we must remember, it wasn’t all stark or austere, by any means.

Kindness and tenderness were always there—in John and for John, levity and

wonderful recall of former memories and halcyon days. And John always exhibited gratitude. Anyone who took the time to visit was always graciously thanked. And in those last visits, there was eloquent silence and profound reverence—“Take off your shoes, you are on holy ground.”

When he relaxed and stopped entertaining his visitors, and a moment of quiet and serenity overtook him, he said distinctly and tenderly: “Precious Lord, take my hand, lead me on, let me stand—lead me on to the light, lead me home.” Those very words indicated John sensed the end was upon him, and, gracefully again he let go into the bedrock comfort of his merited and warranted faith.

On his last birthday, shortly before his sixtieth anniversary of Religious Profession, he again prayed aloud: “I am weak but Thou art strong...” almost singing the refrain this time in his own musical cadence as he spoke the words and deeply felt the sentiment, eyes shut almost permanently, unable to open them at will, cannula in his nose giving him some oxygen, IV in his arm bringing antibiotics to lessen some of the complications, another tube for nutrition. But, this time, they were only medical instruments easing him on, beginning his journey back to his Lord and Savior, his precious Lord.

The gentle and compassionate support given to him, his knowing full well the underlying condition could not be altered, said loudly and clearly, as evidenced by his own vocal prayer at those times, that indeed his God had not abandoned him. His faith was confirmed.

Diane Grounds had been there earlier that day, the day he later prayed aloud at no one’s prompting. He was speaking spontaneously as if directly to God right at his bedside. In that visit before I got there and heard John pray aloud, Diane had assisted John with simple, yet profound tasks. She shaved him, put lotion on his face, even cleaned his glasses which by this time did little to help his vision. Then, she washed his hands and arms, as best she could, leaving little undone for a welcomed refreshing cleansing. Simple things, indeed: “A cup of cold water in my name.”

Good returned to John. The circle of life was being completed. The good he put into this world was coming back to him—right there in the midst of the tension of opposites—travail and blessing, struggle and serenity.

After all, the Village was community. Brotherhood did prevail. Neighborhood does abound in this Holy Cross Village.

Yes, anointing came to him, and in return John shared with us his response— his

faith, his prayer, his acceptance.

How can we not take comfort from this Brother of ours? We need to gain from his example and be informed by his powerful witness, that John's deepest identity was his vocation, his summoning from God his reason for being, his spiritual calling, a universal vocation, to which everyone, everyone of us is called.

The Cross is our only hope. For in it, as trying and difficult as it might be, we too will find, as John so effectively showed us, an incredible embrace of incredible love from the same God who will also carry us through whatever it is we might face in the perfect timing of our own perfect coming home to God.

All in your grace, Lord. All in your time. All in Divine Order. Every bit of it.

In closing, we bless you, John. Thank you for everything you gave...and gave witness to. Take your place, now, at the table of the Lord "prepared for you from the beginning."

Embrace your Jesus, John, kiss your mother and father, hug your brothers, all awaiting you. And, send us always, John—memories and blessings of the unquenchable, inscrutable, all-generous love of God—always and ever in our lives...no matter what.



Holy Cross Associate Annual Get Together

The Midwest Holy Cross Associates had their annual board meeting on the weekend of June 22-24. As part of this event Holy Cross Associates and friends from the Notre Dame area were invited to attend a morning session with Brother Kenneth Haders, C.S.C., the new provincial from the Midwest Province, on practical aspects of Holy Cross Spirituality. About 30 were in attendance.

The Midwest Holy Cross Associate Board then met to do planning for the year. Some new areas for discussion: ways to reach out to our Holy Cross Schools, ways to reach out to the broader Holy Cross Community, planning future regional meetings using skype for a major speaker and setting a theme for the year: “Bringing Light to Your World.”



Ignacio Martinez



Brother Kenneth Haders, CSC



MWHCA Gathering



Jubilee June 16, 2018



Row-4 John Schuszler, Richard Johnson, Donald Schapker, Jerome Meyer

Row-3 Tom Cunningham, James Leik, Walter Gluhm, Charles Devron

Row-2 Robert Fontaine (MP)

Row-1 John May, Thomas Henning

Absent from Picture

(Right) Ronald Frederick Drahozal, Bertrand Nee Wayoe





Here is this year's Jubilee postlude which Dan adapted including his own improvisation:
Click above Picture for video.





Other News



Have you read the [July News Notes from the Generalate?](#)

Reflection

To live content with small means;
to seek elegance rather than luxury,
and refinement rather than fashion;
to be worthy, not respectable; and
wealthy, not rich; to listen to stars
and birds, babes and sages, with open
heart; to study hard; to think quietly,
act frankly, talk gently, await occasions,
hurry never; in a word, to let the spiritual,
unbidden and unconscious, grow up
through the common...this is my symphony

William Henry Channing



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by
Brother
James
Kane,
CSC

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