

BULLETIN -- NOVEMBER 1

Welcome, Sister Sara! This afternoon at 5 p.m. we shall have the final event in our series of anniversary lectures. Sister Sara Butler, M.S.B.T., will speak to us in church about the authority of women in the Church, and afterwards we shall have a question and comment session, with refreshments, in the parish center. Please join us!

All Souls Day. Our Monday morning **8 a.m. Mass** on November 2 will be at St. Agatha's Chapel **at our parish cemetery**. Cemetery staff will be on hand with a bit of refreshment for us after Mass. An additional Mass will be offered **at church at noon**.

This is a good occasion for us to review again the Order of Christian Funerals provided for us by the Church. Combined with the celebration of sacraments and sacramentals toward the end of life, Penance, Anointing of the Sick, Eucharist (Holy Communion or Viaticum), and the Apostolic Blessing and other prayers, the Order of Christian Funerals is designed to accompany our sister or brother on their journey home to the Father's arms. We begin while they are still with us here on earth, even in a very weakened condition, and we continue when they have passed into eternity. While the body lies in death, the soul gains a new awareness of a completely different manner of being. Having not been there, we cannot explain it. Some who have had a "near-death" experience have enlightening stories to tell us, which we are free to believe or not. Most of them seem quite reasonable in view of what we know about God and his merciful love, but they are not on a par with doctrine.

We do know that the departed soul no longer has the same power to bring about the physical or even spiritual results that we are used to in life. Sometimes they seem to be "trapped" in a certain place or way of behaving that might be relatively harmless or might be quite disturbing. All of our uncertainties about such things ought to be calmed by this **FACT**: the Church assures us, with all the power of the love of Christ our Redeemer, that our prayer for our beloved dead **HELPS THEM**. God does not need to be convinced to love the faithful departed. He already does. The purpose of our prayer is to give **THEM** the support of the communion of saints on earth so that they might safely complete their journey to the fullness of the Father's Kingdom in company with Christ. We don't know the dynamics of how that happens. We, and they, trust in Christ's word, "This is the will of the One who sent me, that I should not lose even one of all those he has given me, but that I should raise them up on the last day" (John 6:39).

Being aware of these things, we should be **EAGER** to spiritually assist **ALL** our brothers and sisters in their journey to eternity. Visiting the sick, burying the dead, praying for the living and the dead: these are all works of mercy. It is not merciful, nor at all in keeping with the mind of the Church, to deprive our fellow Christians (or for that matter, anyone else) of the rites and ceremonies which the Church provides for us. It grieves pastors to hear of people who have been faithful and responsible about their Christian duties to be deprived of what the Church offers at the time of death by family members who seem more concerned about cost, cosmetics, or convenience.

"Mom didn't want any fuss." Well, prayers and the Mass are not "fuss."

"Dad didn't want anyone staring at him in a casket." Fine, keep the lid on it.

"My brother hadn't been to church in years, and he just wanted his ashes scattered over his favorite golf course / lake / garden / drain field." Had he been baptized? Had he

been sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit in confirmation? Had that flesh been graced with the Body and Blood of Christ in Holy Communion, even once? He was a temple of the Holy Spirit, a member of the Body of Christ, even though a neglectful one. ALL THE MORE REASON to provide him with the dignity of prayer with which he did not provide himself in life. If he is cremated for a serious reason, those ashes are always to be treated with the same dignity as the uncremated body. That means burial, or entombment in a mausoleum or columbarium. Your brother is neither an animal nor a plaything. Why wouldn't you do the same thing with your brother's corpse that he wanted you to do with his ashes? They are the same reality, different form.

"But he made me promise!" Suppose a pregnant woman had her dying husband make her promise that she would have an abortion so she wouldn't have to raise their baby alone. Is she under any obligation to fulfill that promise? NO! None whatsoever. One need never fulfill an immoral promise. Scattering the ashes of the deceased is not on the same level of seriousness, but both are WRONG. No obligation to do it.

"I keep his / her ashes with me night and day. I just can't bear to be separated." We empathize with your grief, but you need both theological and psychological assistance to get beyond this. You are ruining the one life that God gives you by not taking the necessary steps to move on. This is not disrespect for your departed. Your loved one is cheering you on, urging you to let them go so that you can continue to grow. Your prayers, made in faith, will help to heal you. Burial is the primary way of giving our loved ones back to God--returning them to the earth from which they were made, by God's power.

"We didn't have a funeral because the whole funeral thing is a big money-making racket." Do you think the same thing about medicine, education, auto mechanics, grocers? What about your OWN job, you tightwad? Maybe you need an examination of conscience to figure out why you have such a chip on your shoulder about people who provide service. There are ways to keep costs under control, for those who are really hard pressed. But providing a family member or loved one with a funeral *of some kind* is an act of respect and care perhaps unequalled by anything we can do for them in life. Why? Because they can't pay us back! If you think there's no "profit" for you in paying something to bury the dead, you're absolutely right, at least in financial terms. And maybe it's about time you did something like that to help you realize that life is more than accumulating treasure for yourself.

"I was in the hospital, and you did not come to see me." This is not a corporal work of anti-mercy. It has occasionally been a remark from parishioners who might have felt slighted when they were hospitalized. Sometimes it is due to the pastor's own lack of proper time management. Sometimes the hospital stay was so brief that by the time the priest checked at the information desk, the patient had been discharged. Sometimes no one told us the patient was there. ANYTIME you or a loved one are admitted to the hospital, PLEASE be sure to state your religion and parish affiliation, AND ASK FOR THE CATHOLIC CHAPLAIN TO VISIT. When we visit the hospital from the parish, we do not routinely bring Holy Communion or the oil for anointing. Our hospitals provide Catholic chaplain services, but you have to notify the Catholic chaplains of your presence. Thanks to government privacy laws (HIPAA), hospital personnel and chaplains are not free to discuss or disclose anything about patients unless you give them

specific directions to do so. The priest-chaplains are employed to provide sacramental service, so please request to see them to make sure you are attended in a timely manner. Parish priests and visitors are happy to visit, but your cooperation takes the pressure off considerably.

Drop by the school library and see the dining room outfit, table, four chairs, china cabinet, and a full set of china and silverware. We're doing a silent auction on it. The whole set will go to the highest bidder through a system of sealed bids. Pick up an envelope and card from the table, and write your name, address, and phone number on it, along with your bid for the whole set. (Individual items will not be sold separately.) Mark "Bid" on the envelope and drop it through the mail slot on the front of the parish office / convent or through the milk chute on the back of the rectory. The bids will be opened in the library at 11 a.m. on Sunday, December 6 (St. Nicholas Day). Meanwhile, come in and look, take all the pictures you want, check out comparable deals on eBay or craigslist. A tithe of the purchase price will be given to the parish. It could be an ideal Christmas gift for someone in your family, or for newlyweds you might know. God bless you!

Fr. Den

Thought for the week: "They call a man graceful because he hits a little ball with a certain swing. My father hammered piles on a railroad out of Martinez for 10 cents an hour to support a family. That was grace" (Giuseppe Paolo "Joltin' Joe" DiMaggio, 1914-99, New York Yankees' center fielder 1935-51).