

## Reflection at Night Prayer for Fr. Richard

Express condolences to Fr. Richard's family and whole MM community

As Benedictines we follow a rule and that would be The Rule of St. Benedict – in chapter 4 (which is entitled the Tools of Good Works) there is a tool that Benedict gives us that is: Day after day remind yourself that you will one day die. I used to wonder how this could actually be a helpful tool. Some people may think it very strange – even morbid and depressing. ( I remember a few years ago when one the Benedictine sisters from Yankton, SD gave the day retreat for the beginning of our school year. She used this chapter 4 for the retreat --- she even gave us a little tool at the end of the day – a screw driver a wrench--- to remind us of the tools of good works). I have come to understand that the tool of reminding oneself of death is really a very good thing. It is really more about **living** than it is about dying. If you are aware that death is not far off --- you live your life differently.

And so I want to apply this good tool to the life of Fr. Richard and share a few of my experiences with you about his **living**.

Most of you in this room know Fr. Richard as a dean and English teacher. Fr. Richard taught for many years and many English classes but eventually he settled on Sophomore English and he became famous for that class. He loved to tease and spar with the students. When the sophomores would start complaining about too much homework or anything else for the matter, he would chide them a bit and just say: "You poor babies"! --- so he became famous for those words --- poor babies. Let me remind you alums and students, Fr. Richard taught you to make friends with people like: Flannery O'Connor, Willa Cather, Ray Bradbury, John Steinbeck, Ernst Hemingway, William Shakespeare, Charles Dickens --- and on and on. He was strong on vocabulary words --- very strong. I remember a time either on Monday mornings with the Benedictine Values assembly or maybe a homily, he challenged all of you to be more enthusiastic about learning vocab words. So he suggested that you have the same enthusiasm you do at basketball games – so do a chant like the one you do: defense/clap clap --- defense/clap clap--- do instead a vocab work like: **tenacious**/clap clap—**tenacious**/clap clap. And you students actually did that in the gym for basketball games. It was pretty

awesome. Maybe the other team thought you were crazy, but that is the case anyway!

Some of you thought you could pull the wool over Fr. Richard's eyes because it took him awhile to get down the hall or because he did not move very fast. However--- he did know what was going on --- really he did. Here is an example. This is a true story that I just heard the last few days. When the sophomores were taking a vocab test, one of the students forgot the meaning of **tacit**. So this student asked his classmate next to him – he got the answer. Fr. Richard heard the exchange but did not say anything at the moment. After all students had passed in the exam, he said: I know that there was cheating today --- so whoever is involved will flunk this class unless they fess up. So the student came later in the day to admit the cheating. He was gentle and compassionate. But the student as an alum admitted that forever he has remembered that moment and never forgotten the meaning of **tacit**. Really, Fr. Richard had perfect control in the classroom. He always sat in the front of the classroom --- did not have to move around --- he had perfect command.

Fr. Richard's living in his background –

Family Sheep Farm on 60<sup>th</sup> Street in Omaha--- One time I got invited to go home with Fr. Richard for a meal. When his parents, particularly his father, found out that I was from Abion, Ne --- he let me know that he bought hay from a friend of my family. The Thells were always very kind to me. So I had roast lamb for the first time in life—Wow --- was that ever a meal. It was wonderful and the hospitality was great.

Holy Ghost parish --- just down 60<sup>th</sup> street and left on Q for a few blocks is Holy Ghost --- Fr. Richard's home parish. The past few years, I have been assigned to this parish a lot the last few years --- let me assure you, if you mention the Thell name there, they all know who you are talking about. Fr. Richard was very proud of his parish. I was there for his sister, Shelia's funeral and his parents.

Ryan High School --- Fr. Richard is an alum of the former Ryan High School. He loved to tease our late Br. Joseph Dugick (an alum of South High in Omaha) how

his high school was inferior to Ryan --- Fr. Richard could really get Br. Joseph fired up about this and he enjoyed teasing Br. Joseph. I myself knew that Ryan was a great school. I had 2 classmates who were alums of Ryan as well--- Blasé Cupich – now a Cardinal and Ron Wasikowski--- a priest in the Archdiocese. So I had been to Ryan a lot --- even for their famous plays with a director from New York!

Santa – for us monks --- About this time of the year, Fr. Richard would arrange our gift exchange. And then on Christmas night we all gather in the recreation room after our Christmas dinner. It was always a great time --- Fr. Richard was Santa --- he always kept it lively --- some gifts were jokes and gags – lots of laughter. It will be different for us this year!

Lastly --- I would like to come back to The Rule of Benedict again. I would guess most of you in this room, especially Oblates would be able to answer the question: What is the first word of The Rule of Benedict? **Listen**—yes that is correct. Fr. Richard knew that word well--- he lived that word. He was a good listener. His office was on the main floor of St. Benedict building and you could see a student there often being counseled or helped by Fr. Richard. And often times in faculty meetings when we would talk about a student who needed some help, we would suggest that he talk with Fr. Richard. I know that he saved a number of MM students from the wayward path.

We have just prayed Night Prayer --- this hour of prayer is known as Compline. It means complete. The thought of completion is very appropriate this evening. When a monk professes his vows --- he writes out his vows and then reads them publicly before God and the community, kneeling before the abbot. At the completion of the vows, the abbot says a line something like this: may you bring to completion the good work that you have begun.

Fr. Richard just brought to completion his vows and his monastic promises – he has come full circle. Just shy of 50 years as a monk of MM.

May he be at peace --- no longer encumbered by any physical draw backs or pain. May his soul and the souls of all the faithful departed rest in peace.

**Amen**

