

Homily - Fr Richard

When teaching speech class, Fr Richard would give his students an assignment that went something like this: you can invite three people from anywhere, anytime in history to join you for dinner. Who would you invite and why? A wonderful assignment because it forces you to think. A wonderful assignment because it also speaks to your interests, to your character and what you personally treasure. I never heard Fr Richard reveal whom he would invite. Still I think we can speak to his character and what he treasured.

Jesus says, "Where I am, there also will my servant be." Throughout our lives, we search for God, for the face of God in Jesus Christ. Perhaps we fail to appreciate that those who choose to serve God are the face of Christ right before us. How is it that Fr Richard chose to serve Christ? Is it circumstances of personal history or the hand of God working in unfathomable dimensions? This we know. Fr Richard graduated from Ryan High School, a school built on property donated by his parents William and Eva Thell. Undoubtedly inspired by his parents and a family of parishioners at Holy Ghost in Omaha, Fr Richard answered a call to the priesthood, coming here to St John Seminary heeding the words of the gospel - whoever serves others will serve me. And then responding to another call from the prolog to the Rule of St Benedict - what is sweeter, dear brothers, than this voice of the Lord calling to us? Here in his fatherly goodness the Lord shows us the way of life. Clothed then with faith and the performance of good works, let us set out on this way, with the Gospel for our guide, that we may deserve to see Him who has called us to His kingdom – Fr Richard joined this monastic community. He was a gift of grace from God to us and to all who had the good fortune to have known him.

Fr Richard surely had his faults and weaknesses. But his life speaks to us of the fundamental truths of our faith, of the journey upon which we all must embark on our way to eternal life. We find our way to salvation through identification with Christ, and especially in his suffering. It is hardly necessary to say that Fr Richard embraced his Catholic faith. He became a monk. He became a priest. He dedicated himself to Mount Michael and everything good for which it stands. It would not be possible to list all the ways in which Fr Richard served our monastic community, the school and the community at large. Among many other responsibilities in the abbey, he was until recently the prior. In the school, he taught ever since ordination. He was a dean living with the students for twenty years. How many lives would he have touched in all that time?

It is no exaggeration to say that Fr Richard endeavored to reflect attributes of Christ himself. Anyone who knew Fr Richard would note his gentle, kind and unassuming spirit. He strove to be refined, cultivated and erudite. He loved beautiful literature and beautiful music. His many students certainly had their vocabulary enlarged while he was their instructor. Fr John reminded us last night that the student body's chant of "tenacious" during a basketball game was Fr Richard's idea. Fr Richard never had to raise his voice to command attention. A silent pause and a firm stare always did the trick. If a student complained about having too much work, Fr Richard would quip in response "poor baby". Students who were not always the most popular, nor the most gifted, nor the most noted found a compassionate and understanding friend in Fr Richard because I think he understood laboring with limitations better than most of us. Certainly Fr Richard was often united to Christ in his suffering. We hope and pray that Fr Richard will be raised to new life because of his identification with Christ.

Fr Richard's life gives us a glimpse of the ways in which God can touch our lives. For all of us, be attentive to his example of gentleness and kindness. Pursue beauty and grace as he did. Dedicate your

life to ideals worthy of your gifts and talents. To our students especially I want to address these words. I found a graduation homily that Fr Richard gave in 2003. These are Fr Richard's words, "My advice to you is to work hard toward your goals, but don't be afraid to let God work and speak in your life. (And you know, God is sometimes going to work in your life whether you want him to or not.) Believe me, when I graduated from high school all those many years ago I had no idea that someday I would be delivering a commencement homily at a college-prep boys' school. God works in strange and mysterious ways. Who knows: Maybe 15 years from now, one of you will be delivering the 2018 Mount Michael graduation homily." It is 2018. None of the students from 2003 took up Fr Richard's suggestion. But I can definitely say to you and to all the many students he has had over the years, he would love nothing more than if you considered following God's call in the same unique way that he did.

On behalf of the monastic community, thanks to all of you who came to bid goodbye to Fr Richard in this present life. He would be deeply grateful to you all. Our hearts go out to his sister Pam, to her husband and their children who prized Fr Richard in their lives. I know that Br James, his best friend in the community, will miss him dearly. Like every unique human being, he is irreplaceable. But he would want us all to forge ahead in offering praise and glory to God.

Monasticism is an attempt to witness uniquely to Christ by a life of surrender. With all humility, we follow the small Rule of St Benedict hoping to serve God, to serve one another, and to find our way to our heavenly homeland. We trust that even now, Fr Richard is continuing that journey. And so I close with these final words from the prolog to the Rule. "So never departing from the teachings of God, and faithfully observing his doctrine in the monastery with perseverance until death, we shall share in the sufferings of Christ, so that we may deserve also to share in his kingdom. Amen"