

Friday in the Octave of Easter
Funeral: Father Thomas M. Radaich
April 25, 2014; St. Michael Parish in Duluth

Acts 4:1-12

Psalm 116

Revelation 7:9-10, 15-17

John 21:1-14

Homilist: Father William C. Graham

If you were to ask a priest to describe his vision of a happy death, it is likely that he would say, "I'd like to celebrate the Triduum, the great three days, with the people whom I love and serve, and sing in good voice, preside with dignity, and preach well. After that, I could close my eyes peacefully in death and open them to the vision of Jesus in glory." Those of us who pray daily to have the grace of a happy death can look on this funeral today as an example of an answered prayer. And so we praise and thank God.

So as we continue to make our pilgrim way, we read the scriptures, and we pray over them. And when we do

lectio divina, we sometimes insert ourselves in the story, or see ourselves reflected there. For example, on Palm Sunday, Father Tom could have had a bit of a mystical reflection on the gospel. He might even have identified with the donkey in that Palm Sunday story. Who ever identifies with the donkey? you might ask. But consider: Jesus sent two disciples to “find an ass tethered, / and a colt with her.” “I am a bit like that donkey,” Father Tom might have said. “I was just doing my duties, saying my prayers, and I have been summoned to carry Christ.” Just like that donkey and her colt, he bore the burden of the Lord in his surgery and his recovery.

Our friend did carry Christ, and shared in his sufferings. These last months were truly purgatorial; he suffered with dignity and grace. And his cousin Kay cared for him with uncommon kindness, with the heart of Jesus. May she have the reward of her goodness; church, will you say Amen?

And the parish staff here at Saint Michael’s and all the holy members of this wonderful parish have walked through these months and days with uncommon goodness. A couple generations

ago, this parish welcomed one pastor after another, both too young and too green; “Speak for yourself, Bill,” Father Walsh will say. And I am. And for him, too. You taught us how to be pastors. Later, with Father Fider, you walked the final months with Father Frank Melovasich, and just now with Father Radaich. With youthful pastors, and with those more experienced, you have been kind and grace-filled. May God reward your goodness. And let the Church say, Amen.

Our kind bishop and his group of priests have buried more of the brethren in recent years than he has ordained. This is a challenging age, but Bishop Sirba and his priests remain intrepid and faith-filled. May God give them the courage and grace to continue. And let the church say, Amen!

I want to see Father Tom reflected in the gospel we heard today. When Simon Peter went over and dragged the net ashore, I want to see Father Tom as the guy who observed the disciples in the boat who were not able to pull the net in because of the number of fish. He was the guy who said, “We better count them.” And so they did. They found the net full: one, two, three, one hundred, one

hundred fifty-one, fifty-two, “one hundred fifty-three large fish. Even though there were so many, the net was not torn.” This is such an odd fact that it must be important. So then, he ran to the branch library on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias, because google and iPhones had not yet been invented, and there he discovered that, according to Origen, priest and theologian in the second century, the total number of species of fish, as they believed then, totaled exactly 153! Because, as Andrew Greeley says, Catholicism is a verdant rainforest of metaphors, we know that the boat is a symbol of the church, the apostles in the boat are the foundation of the church, the disciples are the early church, the net is a symbol of the church. So who populates this church? Is it 153 fish? Now, maybe Origen was wrong about what 153 might mean, a representation of the fullness of the fish kingdom. But Pope Benedict, in his book *Jesus*, writes that sometimes we make mistakes in reading scripture, but even those errors can be good for our spiritual life. But if Origen was wrong, no one has come up with a better interpretation of that number since then.

So, 153 lets us know that in the big net, in the big tent, in the big

church, there is room for all of us: all “brothers and sisters / and those of every race and tongue,” all called to the new world where the fullness of God’s peace will be revealed, gathered people of every race, language and way of life, sharing in the one eternal banquet with Jesus Christ the Lord. We, all of us, are called to be “Saints among the Saints in the halls of heaven” (Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation I). This very Catholic understanding was key to Father Tom’s ministry among us; it will be his rich legacy. We may remember him for overseeing the building of an extraordinary house for the church at prayer in Grand Rapids, for his development work here, for his care of the Catholic schools entrusted to him, for preaching, teaching and baptizing. For all of that, we thank him and, at the same time, give thanks and praise to God.

But his richest legacy is his heart, the heart he modeled on the heart of Jesus, the compassionate, Sacred Heart of Jesus. One Saturday evening, Father Tom and I sat in the rectory at Grand Rapids after a round of wedding and funerals, after the Saturday Mass, and in anticipation of Sunday morning Masses and obligations. It was time, I thought, for dinner, and perhaps a cocktail first. The

phone rang; he could have ignored it; he answered; a woman staying at The Itasca Motel had been at mass with her toddler who lost a mitten. Could he open the church so she could look for it? No, says he, "I'll go look for it." He found it; called her back, and then cheerfully delivered it to room 36 at The Itasca, down Highway 169.

Saint Thérèse of Lisieux said, "you can save a soul by picking up a needle." The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that charity unites us to Christ in active love, noting that "The saints have always had a lively awareness that their merits were pure grace" (2011). May Thomas our friend be Clothed in God's justice; beginning with that mitten, perhaps!

"Now the Green Blade Riseth"
John MacLeod Campbell Crum (1872-1958)

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*Now the green blade riseth from the buried grain;□
Wheat that in the dark earth many days has lain;□*

Love lives again, that with the dead has been:

▣*Love is come again, like wheat that springeth green.*

In the grave they laid him, love whom men had slain,▣

Thinking that never he would wake again.▣

Laid in the earth like grain that sleeps unseen:

▣*Love is come again, like wheat that springeth green.*

Forth he came at Easter, like the risen grain,▣

He that for three days in the grave had lain.▣

Quick from the dead my risen Lord is seen:▣

Love is come again, like wheat that springeth green.

When our hearts are wintry, grieving, or in pain,▣

Thy touch can call us back to life again;▣

Fields of our hearts that dead and bare have been:▣

Love is come again, like wheat that springeth green.

John MacLeod Campbell Crum (1872-1958)