

Fr. Cornelius Joseph Murray
Homily – Vespers: Evening Prayer
Thursday, 5 November 2020
Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15: 55-57

My seminary formation at St. Mary Seminary

which at that point was located in Wickliffe, Ohio happened from
1992-1997 and during that period we were assigned
with various field education sites.

When it came to my class or to those men before me or after me,
I remember, it seemed, that everyone wanted to come
to St. Brendan Parish.

Fr. Murray was known as a wonderful priest,
prayerful, pastoral, vibrant, and fun – he liked to have a good time.

To be assigned to St. Brendan

with Fr. Murray, you were guaranteed to have a good experience
because of the parish community and because of the pastor, Fr. Murray.

If the year happened to be a year of
receiving a parish assignment, I remembering, as a seminarian, opening
that field education envelope and hoping against hope
that perhaps I would be sent to St. Brendan to do my field ed. experience.

It was always with a bit of a deep sigh of disappointment
that the hope was never fulfilled.

While in the seminary, I was never assigned to St. Brendan.

Now don't get me wrong,
I loved all my field education experiences
and I certainly loved and learned from my priest supervisors as well,
some of whom are here today... including Bishop Amos.

I am telling you this because it was well over twenty years ago,
that St. Brendan Parish had entered my own

thoughts of being a guaranteed place of great
parish leadership, warm pastoral care and concern, a spiritual community
that knew how to pray with each other
and a loving community that knew how to socialize with one another...
and largely that was due to the priests, the spiritual fathers,
who would call this community to be this way.

Fr. Murray was certainly part of that leadership,
that care and concern, that prayerfulness, and that playfulness.

Fast forward to 2008, twelve years ago.

I finally did open a letter, this one not about field education,
but a letter of a different tone and a different mission.

I open the letter that appointed me as St. Brendan's third pastor.

I remember calling Connie,
setting up a time to meet with him.

We actually met several times before I moved in.

On one occasion, I believe he was driving me around
to show me the parish boundaries...

I was feeling – like any one of us becoming pastors for the first time –

I was feeling a bit overwhelmed and not in my element,
wondering what have I gotten myself into.

I finally asked him, "Connie, what's your advice for me...
my first pastorate, being new to all this in this capacity...
what should I do first?"

After that question came out,
I immediately felt unprepared for the answer,
I thought, "Here we go, here comes the homework,
I should have brought along a notebook and pen to take notes."

Well, this was his response: "Be kind to people."

That's it? Really?

But you know his voice, his tone, his warmth, his charm...

I believed him.

And for the most part, though I have my days, that advice has proven to be gold.

He was that spiritual father in that moment to me.

That would be only the first of many.

It was a bit daunting to take up where this legend – Fr. Connie Murray –
was leaving off in his retirement.

Connie became parochial vicar here at St. Brendan in July of 1973.

I hesitate to say this out loud, but in July of 1973, I was only three years old at the time.

35 years later, I was taking up where he was leaving off.

“Daunting” is definitely the word.

But another spiritual father moment with Fr. Murray.

He was concelebrating a Mass of Christian Burial with me in this sanctuary...

and I’m not sure I needed to hear it,

but I am so glad and was reassured when he said it,

at the sign of peace (remember the sign of peace?)

he offered me peace and then said out of the blue, “I’m glad you’re here.”

You know his voice, his tone, his warmth, his charm...

I believed him.

And didn’t we all believe him?

As brother priests, as family, as parishioners, as friends,

didn’t we all believe him

because of who he believed in ...

and who did he believe in?

“God who has given us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

This is what we just heard proclaimed.

Fr. Murray, a priest who not only pastored this parish,

who built this church and had it dedicated back in 1986,
but he was also a priest involved in the diocese throughout his years
in the Cursillo Movement, the Tribunal, and his ministry
with the Divorced and Separated.
He said in an interview that he was humbled and grateful
to be part of people's lives who most especially felt
afraid or separated from the church
and that he was part of helping them come back
to feel at home and renewed in their church community.
No doubt his Irish warmth and charm won many over throughout the years.
They believed him.

It was Sr. Mary Ann Philip, Fr. Murray's dedicated and diligent friend
throughout these years ...
it was Sr. Mary Ann who noted that
even in these last years and months,
when the sting of age, the sting of declining health,
the sting of the effects of his stroke were heavy...
what claimed the victory in his life?
He would ask for his breviary, even if the prayers had already been prayed.
He would ask, "When am I going for Mass?"
He would ask, "When am I seeing family?"
All of these, were the victory of his life
all of you were the victory of his life
all of this is the victory of his life...
"God who has given us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Karl Rahner, a Jesuit priest and theologian said this,

“The priest is not an angel sent from heaven.

He is a man, a member of the Church, a Christian.

Remaining man and Christian he begins to speak to you the word of God.

This word is not his own. No, he comes to you because God has told him to proclaim God’s word. Perhaps he has not entirely understood it himself.

Perhaps he adulterates it. Perhaps he falters and stammers.

How else could he speak God’s Word, ordinary man that he is?

But must not some one of us say something about God,

about eternal life, about the majesty of grace in our sanctified being:

must not some one of us speak of sin, the judgement and mercy of God?”

Fr Connie Murray did just this

with his whole mind, his whole heart, his whole being.

I would invite more from this parish community to have the courage to come forward into priesthood and religious life and do the same,

I would invite parishioners to invite more and cultivate more religious vocations in your family.

Because, Fr. Murray he did this with his whole priesthood,

lived for God and spoke of God...

He did this among his family and friend...

he did this as a priest, among many, in the diocese,

he did this for me ... some young kid becoming a first time pastor ...

He did this in this parish community.

And, didn’t we know him?

We knew his voice, his tone, his warmth, his charm.

We believed him

because of the one whom he believe in: **Jesus Christ the Lord.**

