

## Funeral Homily for my father, Gerald E. Murray



September 5, 2017

Holy Family Church, New Rochelle, NY

May it please Your Excellency, Archbishop Bernardito Auza, Apostolic Nuncio, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations; Your Excellency, Bishop Peter Byrne, Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of New York; The Rev. Msgr. Dennis Keane, Pastor of Holy Family Church; The Rev. Fathers concelebrating this Holy Mass; Rev. Deacons here present; dear members of my family: my mother Mary Jane, my sister Mary Jane, my brothers-in-law Chris and Glenn, my nieces Mary Kate and Margot, and my nephews Andrew, Tyler and Teddy; my father's brothers Edwin, Jack and Tom; and may it please you dear friends of my father, Gerald E. Murray, especially Joyce, Vedo and Palma who took such good care of Dad during these past eight months of his valiant struggle with illness.

In the preface of the Mass of Christian Burial the Church prays: "Lord, for your faithful people life is changed, not ended. When the body of our earthly dwelling lies in death we gain an everlasting dwelling place in heaven."

Life is changed not ended. This truth of our faith is based on Christ's promise that those who are faithful to Him on this earth will be with Him forever in Heaven: 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.'" (Mt 25: 34b-36) Our Lord welcomes in Heaven those who have served him faithfully on earth.

But to serve our unseen God in holiness and truth requires that we have faith in Christ , who walked among us 2000 years ago and continues to be with us through the power of his grace. We must all fight the good fight of faith against spiritual laziness, doubt or any temptation to disbelieve. We must stake our lives upon

the truth of Christ's words we heard read just a few minutes ago: "I am the way, the truth and the life." It is not enough to know that Our Lord said these words, or that others believe them to be true, or that they have inspired the saints to do great things for God throughout history.

No, what is required of us is that we take these words as the guiding principal of our entire life. As Robert Cardinal Sarah told us in his inspiring book, we have only one choice in life: God or Nothing.

My father was a lifelong, grateful student of John Henry Cardinal Newman. I remember as a boy asking him about a book he was reading with the curious title "Apologia pro vita sua." Newman's "Defense of his own Life" against his critics, my father informed me, is a masterful work of a spiritual giant. My father looked to Newman for enlightenment, guidance and inspiration.

Regarding faith Newman said: "Faith is the result of the act of the will, following upon a conviction that to believe is a duty. "

Faith is duty because we owe to the one who made us and redeemed us the homage of loving obedience, ever seeking to know his will and to put it into practice. A mind enlightened and strengthened by grace and convinced of the truth of Christ happily has only one path to follow: Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life.

My father was a serious Catholic. His joy as a believer was rooted in the solidity of the Church founded upon the rock, and upon the unchanging teaching of Christ. That doctrine taught him what to love in this world, and what to turn away from as displeasing to the Lord. He believed and lived his faith with the naturalness of a true son of God.

He benefitted greatly from his 11 years of Jesuit education: Regis High School, St. Peter's College, and Fordham University. He often said that he owed the Jesuits at Regis a tremendous debt of gratitude for the spiritual, intellectual and moral formation he received. He was a guard on the 1948 undefeated varsity basketball team. He was an actor in the drama club. Both of these activities prepared him well for his life as a husband, father, and lawyer. He knew what teamwork meant. He appreciated persistence in seeking to achieve a goal. As regards acting, he was fond of quoting the George Burns who said: "Sincerity-if you can fake that, you've got it made." Dad had no need to fake sincerity. He knew that there are many ways to present honestly a winning argument when the point at issue was worth arguing for.

His greatest reason for gratitude to the Jesuits, however, consisted in the fact that back in the fifties, even in law school, a student could not sit wherever he wanted to sit, as is the practice in our own day. No, each student was assigned a seat according to that age-old system of alphabetical discrimination known as assigned seating by order of one's last name. When Mr. Gerald Murray arrived at his first law school class he found himself sitting next to Miss Mary Jane Moyles, much to his great delight, given that she was one of only three women students in the day session, and hence the undoubted object of heightened interest by various young men whose last names began with say, A, B, C or S, T or W. Law school classes go on for hours and hours. Those guys never had a chance.

My father served in the US Army in Korea immediately after the truce was declared. He recalled a Christmas time visit to Korea by the Military Vicar, Francis Cardinal Spellman, when he was able to greet the Cardinal and kiss his ring.

Could he then have imagined that a few years later he would be married in Lady Chapel of that Cardinal's Cathedral, or that some 30 years later his son would be ordained to the priesthood in that same Cathedral? Dad loved the Church and communicated that love to his children. He was a daily Mass-goer and said his prayers with devotion each day.

He was kind and patient and mild. He lived according to Cardinal Newman's well known description of a gentleman:

“Hence it is that it is almost a definition of a gentleman to say that he is one who never inflicts pain. The true gentleman ... carefully avoids whatever may cause a jar or a jolt in the minds of those with whom he is cast – all clashing of opinion, or collision of feeling, all restraint, or suspicion, or gloom, or resentment; his great concern being to make every one at his ease and at home.”

This gentlemanly graciousness did not mean that he was a pushover. I remember once in my youthful argumentativeness attempting to refute something he said with the remark: “Dad, that is something out of the Middle Ages.” To which he calmly responded: “What’s wrong with the Middle Ages?” On later reflection I saw that Dad was not only right, but that he was trying to get me to think reasonably, avoiding recourse to facile slogans that are nothing but substitutes for thought.

Newman said: “Nothing is more common than for men to think that because they are familiar with words they understand the ideas they stand for.” Dad was a man who knew the meaning of words, of the ideas conveyed by those words, and of our needs always to seek the truth, because that is what brings us closer to God, and thus to one another.

Newman describes the gentleman as someone who “never speaks of himself except when compelled, never defends himself by a mere retort; he has no ears for slander or gossip, is scrupulous in imputing motives to those who interfere with him, and interprets everything for the best.” My family and his many friends were the beneficiaries of my father’s fidelity to this Christ-like way of dealing with his fellow man.

In considering my father’s life let me quote Cardinal Newman’s brief essay entitled *A Short Road to Perfection*: “It is the saying of holy men that, if we wish to be perfect, we have nothing more to do than to perform the ordinary duties of the day well. He, then, is perfect who does the work of the day perfectly, and we need not go beyond this to seek for perfection. You need not go out of the *round* of the day.”

My father knew how to fill his days with ordinary duties performed with excellence, with love for God as the motivating cause. May he now receive the reward of his labors; may our prayers, if need be, assist him in completing that journey to the land of the living where we look forward to being with God forever, as Cardinal Newman so beautifully described: “After the fever of life - after wearinesses, sicknesses, fightings and despondings, languor and fretfulness, struggling and failing, struggling and succeeding - after all the changes and chances of this troubled and unhealthy state, at length comes death - at length the white throne of God - at length the beatific vision.”

St. Ignatius Loyola, pray for us.

St. Francis Xavier, pray for us.

St. John Francis Regis, pray for us.

Blessed John Henry Newman, pray for us.

St. Teresa of Calcutta, pray for us.

***Requiem aeternam dona ei Domine. Et lux perpetua luceat ei. Amen.***

The Rev. Gerald E. Murray, Pastor  
Holy Family Church  
315 East 47th Street  
New York, NY 10017