

## Thoughts on AJM

Thank you all for coming to celebrate the life of this remarkable man. Thank you to the Marcaccio and Proffitt families. Thank you to Chuck and Mary, Celeste and Steve, and John and Kay for sharing your baby brother to be our Monsignor.

Bishop Martin, thank you. In the short time that you have been here, you have shown so much concern and compassion to **our** beloved Monsignor. I am sorry that you and he will not have the opportunity to work together. I have no doubt that each of your pastoral natures would have meshed so well. Since this is your first time at St. Pius, I think it's fair to share what we've grown to expect. Monsignor used to say that he loved short prayers and long homilies. As he was not our principal celebrant today, I would like to reclaim the 12 unused minutes remaining in our Mass to properly eulogize Monsignor Anthony Marcaccio.

I feel cheated. This wasn't how I wanted this to play out. This wasn't how any of us wanted this to play out. Monsignor and Jesus, however, had other plans. We're here crying and mourning our loss. He, on the other hand, is not. I have two competing thoughts on his current activity. He's either visiting all of the saints whom he adored and whose relics he collected; engaged in conversation, asking all of the questions he first wondered as a boy while reading *The Lives of the Saints* during Mass in Greenwood, and later more weighty theological matters that he'd contemplated at Catholic U as he attended seminary. The second thought is he's made the leap to celestial pirate and is finally able to live his dream sailing the seas in full pirate regalia with Chica and 'Bispo at his side. Maybe both. Likely both. You see, the thing about Monsignor was his ability to exist on two planes simultaneously - A dichotomy. The wonderment and inquisitiveness of a little kid and also the well-formed theology and deep sense of purpose of Pope Saint John Paul II. He was both. And knew when each was appropriate... and inappropriate.

Monsignor's favorite passage in the Bible is Romans 8:28. "We know that all things work for the good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose."

If you knew Monsignor, you know that he embodied this sentiment. He loved God and he was called to be a priest. It was his purpose on this earth, and he excelled at it. We were blessed to have one of the most unique priests in the world as our pastor. I don't say that lightly. I experienced it. I was fortunate enough to watch how people, both religious and lay people, in different countries responded to Monsignor even if they didn't speak the same language. Amazing things happened when you were with Monsignor on pilgrimage. Strangers embraced him as a longtime friend. Fellow religious recognized his holiness and made outrageous accommodations for him, and he never had to ask. He would be singled out in a crowd at an Easter Vigil by the patriarch of Constantinople and an exchange between brothers in Christ would happen. He would be given access for us to gated areas in shrines and chapels; reliquaries would be opened, and we would be allowed to venerate these saints while the jaws of local parishioners would hang open in disbelief. Saint Rosalia. Saint Agnes. Saint Wenceslas. I have to believe in those moments that those same saints he studied in Greenwood and whose small relics he collected were acknowledging his devotion and opening themselves up to him.

The liturgy at St. Pius is beautiful. Monsignor expected it, and we all wanted to live up to his expectations. He focused on every small detail to elevate the experience - from the environment of the church and its appointments to the participants in the liturgy. He raised the bar for all of it and all of us. He inspired us to be as exceptional as he was. He wanted to create an environment where we could experience **what is True, what is Beautiful, and what is Good**. An experience to motivate us to Know, Love and Serve the Lord. Ever the realist, Monsignor knew that he had an hour... *maybe an hour-ish* a week to inspire us to seek the Lord, and to go further. To continue our quest beyond Sundays. His primary tool was his homilies. His homilies. Oh, his homilies were an epic ride. Sheets of yellow legal paper and blue Uni-Ball ink set the lesson for the day - its contents were... serious theology, history, standup comedy, an aside to a pilgrimage experience, a little-known fact about the saint of the day, a quip from Bishop Curlin, powerful thoughts on the human condition, and an insight on scripture from doctors of the church... They were a liturgical Seinfeld episode. I would watch every time with anticipation and wonder “how is he going to pull all of *these* topics together?!?” He always did. Before he proclaimed, “Let us stand,” it was done. He wrapped up. Poignantly. In a manner that I could not only remember it all but apply it to my life. He taught. He knew that having people engaged kept their attention so he could bring home a central theme of the readings for the day. As an aside, I thought about using a reference to Emmaus and asking, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us and opened the scriptures to us?” but decided that he would have much more appreciated the slight irreverence of a comparison to Seinfeld versus being directly compared to Christ.

There’s something to be said about a parish assignment that spans a generation. It creates community with the Father, in this case a Monsignor, as the father of that community. The hub of not just parish life but the lives in the parish. His tenure allowed him to Baptize our babies; Hear our kids first Confessions and give them their first Holy Communion; Confirm our teens; Marry our adult children; administer the Anointing of the Sick and hold us tight as we buried our parents, our spouse or our child. His **tenure** provided him the time to “hit for the cycle” and give a family every Sacrament, but his **nature** made this a community. A family. He was a father indeed. Our patriarch.

An assignment of 24 years allowed for Monsignor to use all of his skills here at St. Pius. He had so many. As a builder, he built the community and then he led that community to build the physical campus. Again, the dichotomy of him shines through. Building community and building this gorgeous campus are not the same skill set, and he possessed each. As a pastor. As an architect. As a mentor. As a counselor. As a friend. As a brother. He created the environment for this parish to thrive and it has.

But again, the duality shows itself. He wasn’t merely an amazing pastor. He was also a dear friend. He opened his life to us. Let us be part of his, and he part of ours. Making him all the more relatable. We were all in on his self-deprecating jokes. Jokes about his love of Italian cuisine. Jokes about waistline because his love of Italian cuisine. Jokes about not recognizing Maya Angelou at a function. Jokes about his childhood. We were in on it all. Here is a question for all of the SPX parishioners. I want you to call out the answer. Who was his mom and dad’s favorite? Chuck. Not a clue if it’s true. Likely not, but it made him so relatable to us. He was just like us, **and also a priest**. He had a family with typical family

dynamics just like ours. He wanted people to see that a holy man of God can also be the most real and relatable man around. Approachable. Genuine. Irreverent. He believed that this authenticity would inspire vocations and invite people to bring their challenges to him. And we did.

His ability to engage anyone was astounding. He didn't have to be in his clerics. Shorts and flip flops wouldn't change how people were drawn to him. ***It wasn't the uniform. It was the man. It wasn't the collar. It was him.*** He would ask complete strangers questions and they would respond as if it was a longtime friend. Though they just met, people were never put off by his sincere curiosity about them. I think it's because that sincerity shone through. Those clear blue eyes and bright white smile put everyone at ease in an instant. His holiness was evident. *The fact that he looked like a cherub didn't hurt.* Within minutes, this new friend would be smiling and having a better day. That is Christ's love that Monsignor reflected so well.

This won't surprise anyone here, but guess who was everyone's favorite patient at Northwestern? Monsignor. His primary doctor said that he had never seen anything like how the staff gravitated to him. As things got difficult, staff would be waiting near his room asking what they could do to help him. They wanted to do more because he had touched their lives in a meaningful way in brief, routine encounters. He reflected God's love and people were drawn to it. We know the qualities that attracted the staff; Sincere, Funny, Focused, Intentional, Thoughtful, Kind, Charitable, Generous, Holy.

He shared Christ's desire for us to be close to our heavenly Father, and he led us to Him. He was happy being in the spotlight but not comfortable being the center of attention. Another dichotomy. He could captivate our attention from the altar and hold court while sharing a meal, but if you attempted to compliment or praise him, he deflected. It took me organizing my thoughts for this to sort out why. I think it was always about bringing people to God. If you made it about him, he was just plain uncomfortable... Light going **out** radiating knowledge and love in the service of God. He wanted it to be about drawing people to God for God's glory, not to himself for his own recognition.

So many lessons taught from this ambo...

Here we are, left with one last dichotomy. This time for us. Our loss and his eternal life. Our want and God's will. Ever the teacher, he prepared us for that, too.

Your will be done, Lord. Nothing more. Nothing less. Nothing else.