

Dick Alexander's Homily
June 28th, 2012
Bernie Curran

Intro:

Good Morning, we are here to celebrate Dick Alexander's life with Barbara, his wife of 35 years, his three daughters Susan, Amy and Jane, his six grand children, and his two great grand sons and of course, all of you, his friends.

The word celebrate has its route in the latin, "celebrare" to frequent , to go in great numbers, to honor. Celebrate has come to mean to perform a *ritual* publicly and formally; to solemnize. This eulogy then is going to do that in the form of a homily as is the Mass celebrating Dick's life. So formally I want to welcome all of you, his family and his friends.

Grace Church:

As for me I am honored to celebrate Dick's life at Grace Church, the Church he loved so much. He loved Grace Church for its beauty and antiquity. He loved it for its liturgy and its pastors. He loved it for its openness to all of God's people: rich and poor, majority and minority, gay people and straight, its choir, its non judgmental attitude, its sense of tolerance, and a place to bring it all together to worship God. It was a mirror of Dick's life: open and welcoming

The Gospel, read:

The Gospel today talks about "There are many rooms in my Father's house; if there were not, I would have told you, for I am going away to make ready a place for you. And if I go and make it ready, I will come back and take you with me, so that you may be where I am... You know the way to the place where I am going"

Thomas said, "Master, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?" *Jesus said, "I am the Way, the truth and the life"*

Digression:

Now, I want you to hold this quote in your mind. For a few minutes keep it out in the Parking Lot of your thoughts. I will come back to it. I want to digress just for a bit to tell you how Dick fitted into my and many other people's lives.

I met Dick several years ago at George and Char Kennedy's home. When we saw each other we recognized that we had met before. (His eye brows gave him away). Dick had been the Chairperson at St. Leonard's house in Chicago—that is a place, a half way house, for people getting out of prison, most of whom are poor. I was the Executive Director of Safer Foundation, an organization that works with ex-offenders just getting out of prison. That was the beginning of a friendship that touched my life in ever so many ways. It was to last a life time.

An aside:

Perhaps, many of you have read the obituary in the Telegraph Herald. Dick was on ever so many Boards, owned his own law firm, and helped so many people in life. He truly was famous in Chicago and out here in Galena. *All his charitable works spoke to the person inside, the real Dick Alexander.*

His Life was a Sacrament:

His life was a sacrament to ever so many people. Most of us are familiar with the sacraments like baptism, confirmation, holy orders etc. A Sacrament, in a broader sense, is a person, place or thing that reveals a face of God. Dick's life was indeed a sacrament. He, like Jesus in today's Gospel, was the way, the truth and the life. His life put us in contact with a much deeper reality...

The Journey Group:

I am perhaps getting a little ahead of myself. I mentioned I met Dick at George and Char Kennedy's place at a meeting we call The Journey Group. The Journey Group is a form of group Spiritual Direction. Its method is simple. Did you grow closer to God and your neighbor or get lost in the complexities of life? We meet monthly. Over the years we grew to know one another quite well.

My Perception of Dick:

Dick was always a very active and supportive participant. His interests were wide spread. He read in Quantum Physics to the New Cosmology--the latest findings in Astro Physics. In other words, he sought for God at the micro and macro level of life. (Examples: Non Locality; Particles of light versus waves. The Big bang theory leading to evolution. The Hubbel Telescope and the billions of galaxies etc.) He sought God in his relationship with others. He questioned. He probed. He met his God in daily meditation. He followed the Psalmist advice, "Be still and know that I am God." He sought God in the Hebrew, Jewish Scriptures. He sought God in the New Testament. He wanted to understand those Sacred Books through the Critical Methodology studies of recent times. He would say if you can put God in a box, it ain't god. He always tried to stay open to the mystery; God was within and yet much bigger than he.

Perhaps, some of you have read the Play Dick wrote. He questions, probes, and lets the reader decide—always with a touch of humor.

Lest you think Dick only read books I want to clear that up. *He lived his God.* He loved deeply, beginning with his wife Barbara. He worshipped her. I think if someone were to make a movie about love in marriage Barbara and Dick's life could be used as a model. He loved his family. He loved his Church and the Synagogue Barbara and Dick attended. He loved people. He loved his God. He simply loved life.

Here in Galena he knew a mix of people:

Did you ever go to one of Barbara and Dick's New Year's gatherings? They were the perfect hosts. The people attending covered a wide range of back grounds. It was fun from Good food and drink to getting a Tarot card reading. Dick made you feel a part of their lives as soon as you walked through the door of their house.

The End Time:***May***

Now, I want to fast speed forward to May, a month ago. Dick told the Journey Group that he had Esophageal Cancer. He told us he did not have much longer to live, maybe six months; maybe a lot less. We were astonished. Esophageal Cancer was a difficult road to walk. He spoke openly about his fears as only a very brave man can do. He talked about his God, about his wife and family and at times, how much he would miss life. He loved life. He kind of challenged God as only good friends can do. He was letting us into his thought process. We just listened.

June 16th:***Description***

Now it was June 16th, Saturday, not even two weeks ago. Dick wanted to be with us, his friends, in the Journey Group. Rob Vollkommer e-mailed us to call a special meeting for Dick. We wanted to be there for him.

Barbara and his daughter drove him to the Kennedy's home. He could hardly get out of the car. He had one of those walkers and I helped him from the car to the house. He had lost 20 lbs in the short time since we had seen him. And Dick was thin to begin with.

He sat down at his place at the table. He asked for hot chocolate or a coke. He then smiled and told us how happy he was to be with us, that he had a lot to share.

George's questions:

George Kennedy asked him, as he approached death, what was the most important thing he wanted to talk about. He quietly sat there collecting his thoughts. He said firstly that he wanted to thank us for coming together, that he was deteriorating quickly and he wanted to see us while his brain was in tact—the cancer, the metastases was growing quickly.

He then talked about something that we had discussed in the past, The NOW moment. He simply said, as his death was imminent, NOW meant something different for him than it did in the past.. He said that is the biggest thing he wanted to tell us about. NOW meant something that was hard to explain because he was experiencing the NOW moment. He was living the NOW moment, now.

He then spoke about how he would miss life here, Barbara and his family, his friends especially us in the Journey Group. He even felt sorry for us because he would not be present.

He commented that the various differences in Religion were really of no consequence.. (He used a very salty word to describe those differences.) He said God simply is love.

I then returned to the question about the meaning of NOW at this juncture of his life...I recalled that several years ago he had given us a peak into his prayer life. He, at that time, described a Mystical Experience: an experience of oneness with all people and the universe, a feeling of love toward all, a sense of timelessness, a sense of THE PRESENCE. (My term.) I asked him if that is what the NOW moment meant to him as he approached his own death. He gently shook his head and said, "Yes". Dick was already going through that vale between this life and the next.

A bit of a digression:

I thought of what my nephew, who is a Hospice Nurse said. He had witnessed people kind of half way between this world and the next... He believes people who are in their final days begin that transition to the "other side". Often their very language changes. They talk about things like their train is leaving..

The final question:

One more question emerged before we broke up the meeting. Who was his greatest support as he approached his final moments? He said, his friends but especially "Barbara", his wife. He knew she would be there for him, *always*...

Dick's final mass:

When our Mass Celebrant, Rev Linda Packard, asked me to do this homily she told me of an incident that deeply touched her. Last Saturday she celebrated mass at Dick and Barbara's home. Dick was conscious but weak. "Around the bed were all his children, grandchildren, and great grand children...It was amazing...He said, "I love you all", "oh my God". "This is so wonderful" and "look at this---wow, look at this".

This description of Dick's last mass was written by Barbara. It was written in the e-mail she wrote to many of us the day Dick died.

Dick died a couple of days later, holding Barbara's hand. Dick was right; Barbara would be there supporting him, as he returned to the home he never left, the Heart of God .

Conclusion:

Please recall the first reading 1 John (4:7-13). Dick is now experiencing what the letter of John described. To paraphrase it: " God is love and he who abides in love abides in God and God in him... Love overcomes fear and perfect love remove it".

Dick, We know you have gone to help prepare our place.. Like Jesus, your life too is The Way, The Truth and the Life” . Indeed, your life was/is a sacrament of God’s love to me and many others.

Be seeing you...

Ref. Dick Alexander

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