



Funeral Mass

Father John Patrick Miller

Saint Anthony Parish, Missoula, MT

Ecclesiastes 3:1-11; 1 John 3:1-12; John 12:23-26

October 5, 2021

Homily: Fr. Ed Hislop

On the day of his baptism in 1948 John entered the “Sacred Dancing Waters.”¹ Washed clean of death, anointed with the sweet fragrance of Christ, and clothed in the white garment of ministry, he began his journey to the Table of the Lord where he received Christ, into whom he was baptized, and with the whole Church, was “transformed into what he consumed.”²

From the Table of Eucharist John Patrick Miller was anointed and nourished to live in an “appointed time for everything and a time for everything under the heavens.”

Graced with faith, nurtured in love, his time of living was filled with joy and laughter, sadness and loss, health, and sickness. Immersed into a “time for everything under the sun,” John grew up with an Irish spirit of laughter, a deep and abiding love of others and a spirited sense of their stories and tales. There may a time to weep but there is more time to laugh. There might be days to mourn, but more times to dance!

It was perhaps in all those times of laughter and dance, sadness, and grief, that filled John with a deep and abiding love of people—people of every sort and type in every place, in every part of the world. John knew people, and soon everything about them! Their story became his to tell and in each telling more was discovered!

This remarkable love and amazing spirit instilled in John a deeper sense to serve, to live in a new and vibrant way the promises made on the day of his Baptism.

To expand his vision of caring service *among the people* whose lives touched him, the command he heard Sunday after Sunday, “Go in peace to love and serve the Lord” took on a deeper meaning.

John chose to live his baptism in service among the baptized and all the people of God. On the day of his ordination to priesthood the hands of the whole church, from generation to generation, were laid upon him, and John was anointed again, with the “fragrance of holiness and joy,” to sanctify the Christian people and offer sacrifice to God for *and with them*. And that he did.

His Irish upbringing in O’Neill—the Irish capital of Nebraska, eventually led him to Butte, the Irish capital of America! His love of people, his interest in the stories of their lives shaped his priesthood and inspired the people he loved and served. John became a part of people’s lives as a priest, friend, brother and neighbor. It was as if he lived among them all his life!

John is a priest of the Second Vatican Council. Filled with it’s “fire of hope” and embracing spirit, John’s ministry in every place he served reflected Pope John XXIII’s hope and promise of “a new day dawning on the Church, bathing her in radiant splendor.” “It is yet the dawn,” Pope John said, “but the sun in its rising has already set our hearts aglow. All around is the fragrance of holiness and joy.”³ John’s ministry, his vision, love, and spirit reflected that hope, set many hearts on fire and inspired him to move forward into the unknown with the hope and truth that all are God’s children.

¹ “Sacred Dancing Waters” is the native American name for Lake McDonald, Glacier National Park. An apt description of the waters of Baptism.

² The Roman Missal: Prayer After Communion-Twenty-seventh Sunday Ordinary time)

³ Saint Pope John XXIII, Opening address Second Vatican Council

He loved people, and people love John! Blatantly honest, sometimes a bit mischievous, John connected with people all over the world and established deep and lasting friendships, with the many and diverse “children of God.” The fire in his soul burned away separation and divisions, healed broken hearts and changed lives. But John was also honest. He could never hide the truth, or his understanding of it.

He was open and caring but also challenging and confronting. For John there was a time to embrace, and a time to be far from embracing. A time to seek, and a time to cast away. John loved the Church, but was often troubled by those unable to feel the fire of hope of days yet to be or those who could not see or believe the love bestowed on us all, making all—all—children of God.

Like Saint John, Father John Miller believed and felt in his heart and soul that what we shall be has not yet been revealed. It is still the dawn.

Every day is a new day; every person bearing something of God never before seen; every person ready to set the heart aglow again and again.

John’s living, his baptismal transformation, his priestly ministry was a mission: A mission forward, following Christ, to what has not yet been revealed. Forward to places never before seen, forward with people never before met. Forward with vision never anticipated, forward to the dawn of a new day, “where the sun in its rising sets hearts aglow.” Forward to see what love the Father has bestowed on us, that we may all be called, and finally be welcomed, as Children of God. “Whoever serves me must follow me,” Christ dramatically reminds us. “Where I am, there also will my servant be.” Among the people, on the way, among the many the world does not know.

There is an appointed time for everything. A time to be born and a time to die. A time to see a single life, lived to the full, always with and for others, falling to the ground, where a new day is dawning, moving forward beyond the earth to be like the One served so well, to see God, finally, as God truly is, still bestowing love-love on all.

So, in the “Sacred Dancing Waters,” John’s new life is “bathed in radiant splendor;” he has moved forward to a new creation, which shaped his vision and journey to the sacred Table all the days of his life.

We too sojourn through these days, nourished for “what has not yet been revealed” each time we find ourselves at this holy altar, where we eat and drink to become, together, the one we consume, nourished to move forward “to love and serve the Lord,” with hearts aglow. At this table, with the risen Lord, John still sings with us in a time eternal, embraced to the full in the love the Father has bestowed on us that we may all – all - be called the children of God.

Servant of God, servant of the people, servant of the Church, the Body of Christ, now with God for all eternity, John is honored. He has served well. “All around is the fragrance of holiness and joy!”

“Deep peace,” Father John, “deep peace of the quiet earth to you, deep peace of the gentle night to you.”⁴ Now you are home, home at last. “There is a time for everything...”



⁴ “Deep Peace” – Hymn at Presentation of the Gifts. By Barbara Bridges. Published by Oregon Catholic Press.