A Tribute to Father Otis by Ruth Prats

Addressed to the St. Peter community on the occasion of
Father Otis Young, Jr.'s retirement farewell Mass
June 12, 2022 at Saint Peter Church.

I remember so clearly Father Otis's first visit to tour the church and the school. It was the May, prior to his July start. I was taken aback. He was carrying a legal size notepad, and it was filled with lines of questions so that he could properly prepare for his assignment here at St. Peter Parish. It was methodical, it was comprehensive, it was organized, and it reflected him perfectly. The preparation he took before even starting here was beyond my comprehension. It was a glimpse into his process, and oh how magnificent that was. I knew that meticulousness was God's gift that had been given to him, that he perfected as an auditor, and that he would now share with our parish. As we went through the list, line by line, he finished with a question. It was the BIG QUESTION. "How do y'all have fun around here?" I know he has laughed about my reaction to this for years. I just gave him a blank look because I had been working many, many hours. I then suggested he talk to Melody Barousse, who was the principal of the school at that time because they were bound to have fun at the school!

Going forward, our laughs were many and deep. I remember the time he sang *This Little Light of Mine* with the St. Joseph the Worker choir. He tried so hard to keep up with their rhythm. I recall fondly the Christmas staff parties and White Elephant games. And who could forget the Santa hats?! However, one of the funniest times was when he told a parishioner who was a French teacher that he also spoke a foreign language. She asked him which one and he said, "I speak fluent Redneck. I'm from Mississippi!"

The legacy that Fr. Otis has left at St. Peter is gigantic. He instituted the year-long celebration of the 175th Anniversary with the placing of the two statues in the back of the church of St. Peter and the Holy Family to remind us how those two parishes merged together in the 1960's. He was responsible for the renovation of our church, and how beautiful our sacred space is now! He was also instrumental in the renovation of the Upper Room and the Youth House, as well as the building of the Holy Family Center. How magnificent is that? The list goes on and on and on.

But none of these is his greatest legacy. He taught us how to suffer and how to carry our crosses. There are many books about people giving faithful service with and through suffering, and even numerous movies. They are meant to be

inspirational and to encourage us to reach for the greater good, the higher level, the eternal goal, and the crown of glory that awaits us. But here at St. Peter Parish, we do not need books or movies, because what we have is even greater, my friends. Fr. Otis walked among us; with a pep in his step in the earlier years, and then struggled steps after the stroke. He will be remembered for giving in the struggle; his endurance, his perseverance, his faithfulness, and for caring for his flock even when caring took every ounce of energy he had.

He did not want to leave us abruptly in the middle of the night. So, he worked tirelessly to return and came back to walk in our midst, even using a walker. He celebrated Mass, even when it was a struggle, and let us hear the shepherd's voice again because he wanted to come back and thank his parishioners for their support and prayers. Humbly. Oh, so humbly he came back. That is his greatest legacy here.

At times, God pulls back the veil and lets us see his mighty works. It's always at His appointed times, and that happened when Fr. Otis came back to St. Peter. But there was another time. We were privileged to catch a glimpse at Father's inner prayer life. It was a sacred and profound moment hearing the words of his private prayer before celebrating the holy sacrifice of the Mass which he shared with the little children making their first Communion. They were words from the very depth of his heart; the prayer of a priest to his Heavenly Father. The prayer was this:

"Lord grant me the grace to celebrate this Mass as if it was my first Mass, as if it was my last Mass, and as if it was my only Mass."

My friends, I end with this. May Fr. Otis's personal prayer become our prayer today and from this day forward when we celebrate Mass. May we pass this prayer down to future generations and to all who enter the doors of St. Peter. It will then be in that prayer that we remember that Father Otis walked in our midst as our pastor and touched our lives profoundly.

So now faithful servant, as you leave us, may the Lord keep you, bless you, and shine His light upon you. Amen.