

***Homily for the Requiem Mass of John Mulcare***

October 3, 2020

Church of the Ascension, Chicago

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*Jesus said, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going." Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." John 14:1-6*

Thomas said to Jesus, "*Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?*" How, indeed, can we know the way?

Getting us all together here this morning has been quite a journey. We've waited now for more than six months since John's death. And a number of us, enduring a number of delays, and with many unanswered questions, have certainly asked what Thomas asked of Jesus in the gospel text that we just heard: "*Jesus ... how can we know the way?*"

John died last March only one week after Governor Pritzker's COVID-19 Executive Order. To some of us it seems a lifetime ago. I wonder if perhaps John knew the way for himself then, recognized an opportune moment to make his way back to the heart of God. Whether or not that is so, we missed him right away at the time of his death, we missed him throughout these months when we did not know the way, and we continue to miss him today.

Over this past week, as I have recalled John again, I've found myself doing so in conjunction with today's gospel text. I will return to it in a moment. But another gospel text has more often come to my mind. It's a few lines from the Sermon on the Mount from the Gospel of Matthew, just after the Beatitudes. Jesus says, "*You are the salt of the earth ...*" (Matt. 5:13)

We all know that vernacular expression – right? – when we say someone is '*the salt of the earth.*' I would argue that John qualified, even if we often imply by that designation that someone was unsophisticated. John was anything but unsophisticated. He was, as we all know, drawn to all things cultural, loved a great book, a superb meal, a peerless theatrical production.

But consider also how many persons of all ages and from so many contexts called him Uncle John. Consider his ready eye contact and his humble, consistent personal warmth, his consistent and genuine curiosity, his interest in our lives and thoughts, and his lifelong vocation as teacher. Until some of you shared it after he died I was unaware that in addition to having a keen mind and a good heart, John was also good with his hands, and that, among other ways, he expressed his own creativity through woodworking.

Then, of course, there was also John's impeccable dress, always and everywhere. Having visited him a few times in the hospital, I can tell you that he even managed to look mighty fine in a hospital gown.

This may be sounding more like a eulogy than a homily, but in that teaching from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew, Jesus goes on to ask, "... *if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored?*" It's not a question that I believe Jesus would have asked of John Mulcare, who seemed to both relish the flavor of life itself and to exude and share it right to the end. It is a good and right and joyful thing for us to take time this day to remember John, even to relish his tastes and gifts and how he blessed us.

But back to today's gospel, and '*how can we know the way?*' Jesus makes clear in answering Thomas that he, Jesus, is the way, the truth and the life. Yes! And I also remind you this morning that, having become the Body of Christ, you and I are also, now, *the way*, even the very way about which Thomas asked. Here in this requiem, we join Christ in being the way for John. Our vocation in faith with regard to John here and now is to be and become the way by which John's soul is entrusted to God and to God's eternal care.

So it is that we began together by praying: "*O God, whose mercies cannot be numbered: Accept our prayers on behalf of your servant, John Raymond Mulcare, and grant him an entrance into the land of light and joy ...*" And soon, in the Prayers of the People, you and I will pray,

"... *give to our brother eternal life ...*"

"... *bring our brother John to the joys of heaven ...*"

"... *give him fellowship with all your saints ...*" and

"... *grant him a place at the table in your heavenly kingdom.*"

You and I, by our prayers, by our intentions, and by our faith, join with Christ in becoming the way for John to find his way back to the heart of God. As we do so, may we also find our grief lightened and our own faith renewed in Jesus, the Christ, the one who is our way, our truth and our life. *Amen.*