

## Requiem Mass for Michael Milano

January 11, 2020

Church of the Ascension, Chicago

The Very Rev. Patrick Raymond, Rector

Our circumstances here today suggest three particular qualities or themes, the first of which, you'll be grateful to hear, is brevity. Adding many words does not always add more meaning. Peter and Cathy and I compared notes yesterday and agreed that a variety of circumstances and needs will be well served by brevity.

A second quality, of value at any similar leave-taking, is authenticity. We want the portrait that is held up of the loved one who has died to resemble the loved one we knew in this life. Right?

I'm grateful for Peter Milano's words in this regard. I am also grateful for a phone call that I received here at Church of the Ascension almost exactly 4 years ago, just after I started my ministry here. It was Mike Milano. He wanted to take me out to lunch, specifically at O'Brien's, over on Wells Street. Things were difficult here at the time. Mike clearly wanted to be of help. He wanted me to succeed, not so much so that the priest would look good but so that the parish he loved could recover some genuine peace and a renewed sense of its mission. I continue to feel indebted to Mike for the care, practical wisdom and faith that he shared that day.

I am partly telling you the story of that lunch because, just yesterday, I was stopped in the church hallway by a man named George Panice, our church Sexton, the staff member who is primarily responsible for all of our buildings and grounds. George shook his head, "*Wow! Mike Milano. That's a big loss.*" And then George said, "*Mike taught me so much over the years. I mean, of course he taught me a lot about buildings and grounds and how to fix things, but even more he taught me a lot about people, how to work with people. It's made such a big difference for me.*"

If you know how churches typically work, you may understand how very differently the priest and the sexton can be viewed and treated ... unless you're someone like Mike Malano. It seems as if Mike often did his best to give and support and share equally with all, regardless of status or visibility or apparent importance. George Panice and I could have gone on yesterday, to describe our common experience of Mike. We would have agreed that Mike was straightforward and loyal. We would have swapped stories that showed his love for his church, his love for his people and family, and his quiet but enduring love for his God.

I began by invoking brevity, and I am at risk of violating that intention. I've also spoken of authenticity, hoping that all of us here may begin to glimpse some ways that we will remember Mike in times to come. A third quality I wish to hold up for us is faithfulness. I don't need to elaborate on faithfulness here. It is both implicit and repeatedly emphasized in all that we share and say and do in this Requiem. Here we are, all of us together: naming the mortality and the need for God's mercy that we all share. We use the words of faith, hope and love to name the eternal life with God and all the saints that we envision, not only for Mike, but, in God's time, also for ourselves. Thanks be to God.