

A Tribute to Fr John Harvey, OSFS
Given by Fr. Paul Check at the National Catholic Bioethics Center
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Not even two months ago, on the feast of his patron saint, St. John the Evangelist, and right at the hour of mercy, Fr. John Harvey went to his eternal reward. Over 30 years ago, the Servant of God, Terrence Cardinal Cooke, had asked Father, at the suggestion of Fr. Benedict Groeschel, to begin an apostolate in the Archdiocese of New York to a group of men and women who often feel estranged from the very “gift of God” St. Paul mentions in tonight’s reading. (Rom 3:23-25) In the mind and heart of Fr. Harvey, Courage was [and remains] the Church’s response to that sense of estrangement ... a practical and pastoral means to diminish fear, isolation, confusion, resentment, and even anger, and to remedy misguided compassion ... all of which tend to surround the question of homosexuality. Where the Church must say “no” to what is contrary to the moral law, through Courage she also says “yes” to those who struggle with same-sex attraction. In certain areas of sexual morality that can be particularly challenging for some, Cardinal Cooke and Fr Harvey knew that the Church must provide both clear teaching and also, as a matter of *natural* justice, the *means* to be faithful to the moral law, especially when the culture is hostile.

Those of us blessed to know him well knew that Father Harvey was a peaceful soul, in the sense of Augustine’s *tranquillitas ordinis*. Tonight’s reading for evening prayer comes from the section in Romans where St. Paul addresses justification through faith in Christ. For Fr. Harvey, homosexuality was not first a cultural issue or a political matter to be debated, but a personal daily struggle in the lives of many. The Church had given him a mission in the name of Christ, which he cheerfully and manfully embraced, and his sturdy faith never faltered, irrespective of the controversy, the resistance, or the seemingly modest results ... and so he did not lose his peace. And Father believed, as Our Lord taught us, that there is no conflict between charity and truth, and this further deepened the tranquility of order in his soul, which then manifested itself in his work as the founding director of Courage.

“The redemption wrought in Christ Jesus” came at the highest of all possible prices, the blood of the Lamb of God. When we think of the Cross, we understandably think of substitution, Jesus taking our place, offering Himself in ransom, as St. Paul reminds us in this passage. But in our theology of sacrifice, we think not only of substitution, but also of solidarity ... of Christ not just offering himself for us, but of Him suffering with us, in that divine compassion that has no limit and exceeds all measure of generosity....“a merciful solidarity, flowing from the charity of Christ.” (Jean Riviere)

In his spiritual fatherhood to many, Fr. Harvey showed how, through the Courage apostolate, the Church continues to give flesh to that solidarity of Christ with fallen man. No matter the specific origin of same-sex attraction in a given person's life, the greatest and most effective balm will always be the Cross, which can imbue an especially painful and vexing form of suffering with purpose and direction ... and most of all, hope ... hope that one is not alone, not estranged from the "gift of God" won by the blood of the Lamb, because through His Mystical Body, Jesus is at hand.