

Funeral Homily for Father Alphonse M. Kubat (August 3, 1916 – January 2, 2006) St. Wenceslaus Church, New Prague, Minnesota. January 7, 2006

Archbishop Flynn, my brother priests, and my dear friends in Christ, I am grateful for the honor of delivering the homily at this Mass, and endlessly grateful for the honor of having had Fr. Kubat in my life as a priest, a confessor, and a friend. In my Christmas card to him this year I wrote, "You are one of my greatest inspirations, and heroes." It is deeply moving to be here in this church where my faith was born, and where I received all of the sacraments except Holy Orders, which I received from Archbishop Flynn in the Cathedral of St. Paul. The last time that I was in this pulpit was 9 and a half years ago as I celebrated a Mass of thanksgiving as a newly ordained priest. Fr. Kubat had a special role in that Mass, just as he did in my life, and in the lives of everyone who knew him. Concerning this homily he said, "No lies!" By this I'm sure he meant, "Do not say that I was a saint or a great priest." He was too humble ever to think of himself that way. But I can say it, and be faithful to his wish. "A truthful witness does not lie" (Proverbs 14:5). Like so many others, and speaking for them all, I have been given the grace to witness the inspirational faithfulness of this man, and to experience the saving power of Jesus Christ through his priesthood.

I was only 4 years old when I experienced it for the first time in 1969 when he came to this church as an assistant to Fr. Charles Jirik and then his dear friend Fr. Raymond Zweber. Though I do not remember him clearly from that time I grew, like everyone else in this area, to know who Fr. Kubat was, though I, and most others, had no idea what this man had suffered, and that in our midst was a living martyr. Most of us could not imagine the life he lived and the sufferings he endured. With the death of Pope John Paul II last April the world's memory was reawakened to the horrors of World War II and some of the darkest moments of the 20th century. The tributes brought to life the fear and danger of living in countries invaded by the Nazi's. They showed the persecution and loss of freedom of living under Communist rule. At the same time John Paul II was suffering in Poland, and the younger Benedict XVI in Germany, a young Alphonse Kubat was suffering in neighboring Czechoslovakia. When his native land was invaded by the Nazi's in 1938 he was forced to work in a wood plant making barracks. In 1940 he suffered an accident to his right hand. After that they did not want him any more and he was able to continue his education. He was ordained a priest on June 28, 1942 and spent the next two years as a parish assistant in Golcuv Jenikov after which he became an Administrator (Pastor). In 1948 the Soviet supported Communists occupied his country and the persecution of the Catholic Church began. It started with the bishops, then priests, and some laymen.

Those who would not pledge their loyalty to the Regime were

incarcerated in an old Carthusian monastery that was turned into a prison. It was named Kartouzy. Fr. Kubat's time came in 1953. He was ordered to report as a witness in some case; little did they know that he was and would always be a faithful witness to Christ and His Church. He knew this was not good and brought along his breviary and a toothbrush. He did not return to his parish but was sent to Kartouzy to become one of a thousand prisoners, 200 of whom were priests. A few years ago I asked him if he could say Mass there. He laughed and with a wave of his hand said, "Noooo!" Only five times in those two years were they able to secure some bread and with some smuggled raisins from which they made a crude wine they offered Mass from memory using a spoon for a chalice. He risked his very life to have Jesus truly present through the Mass, a powerful witness to the greatest gift that Jesus gave to His Church. Six weeks of this time was spent in solitary confinement where he nearly died. His incarceration ended in 1955 and because he was considered unreliable by the Regime was assigned by the Work Bureau to manual labor in construction and in a steel factory. During this time his priestly work was done secretly and always at personal risk.

This continued until August, 1968 when in response to the Prague Spring the Soviet Army moved in to crush the faint hopes of freedom. Realizing that things would not be getting better he left his beloved homeland and crossed the border into Austria. He was appointed as a parish assistant at the Church of St. Nicholas in Inzersdorf in the 23rd district of Vienna. There he sought to immigrate to the United States and was accepted in June 1969. He came to the New Prague area because his uncle, Fr. Alphonse Kotouc had served here, and by whom his mortal body will rest until "The Lord Himself, with a word of command, with the voice of an archangel and with the trumpet of God, will come down from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first" (1 Thess. 4:16 2nd reading).

At the age of 53 Fr. Kubat began a new life in a new country. Though many of the names were familiar and there were those with whom he could speak his native Czech, it was new. The freedom must have been exhilarating to him, and his understanding of it greater than our own. John Fitzgerald of New Prague helped him to become a citizen and his citizenship certificate was always proudly displayed on his wall. Perhaps his greatest joy was finally being able to act as a priest freely and without fear. And so he did. In 1974 he was appointed Pastor of Most Holy Trinity church in Veseli which he called his new family. Also caring for St. Nicholas church in New Market for a while, he was finally able to be who he was: a priest of Jesus Christ. That was the most important reality in his life. He knew what a priest was, and he lived up to it. Having been deprived of exercising his priesthood for most of his life gave him an appreciation of it from which we can all learn. Perhaps that is why he was so joyful.

Just this past Advent I cited him as an example of true joy. He was the

most joyful person that I have ever met. I think it was because he knew Christ, not as a concept, but as a person. He knew that his priesthood united him to Christ and in his sufferings he had shared in the sufferings of Christ, which lead to the joy of the Resurrection. He lived what St. Peter described in his 1st letter: "In this you rejoice, although you may have to suffer through various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that is perishable even though tested by fire, may prove to be for praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Although you have not seen Him you love Him; even though you do not see Him now yet believe in Him, you rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, as you attain the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls" (1 Peter 1:6-9). One would not be able to guess that this man had suffered what he did. He did not talk about his past unless you asked him. Once you came to know him it was evident that in his own life the words of the prophet Daniel in the first reading had been fulfilled: "It shall be a time unsurpassed in distress since nations began until that time. But the wise shall shine brightly like the splendor of the firmament, and those who lead the many to justice shall be like the stars forever" (Daniel 12:1,3).

He was a wise man. Wisdom can be defined as "seeing things through the eyes of God." And this is what he could do: see things as God did. He shared this wisdom by his words and by his life. When I first felt the call of the priesthood I would go to Veseli and visit with him with my friend Tim Deutsch. We continued to do this when he went to Montgomery and in St. Paul in the Leo Byrne Residence. Many seminarians discovered this same treasure. He became a confessor, a mentor, and a spiritual director for many, right to the end. He again fulfilled the words of Scripture this time from the book of Sirach: "Frequent the company of the elders; whoever is wise, stay close to him. Be eager to hear every godly discourse; let no wise saying escape you. If you see a man of prudence, seek him out; let your feet wear away his doorstep!" (Sirach 6:34-36). I am afraid that the carpet in front of room 316 may have to be replaced.

During these visits he would use his many endearing phrases. When I would call him from downstairs I would say, "This is Mike." His response would be, "You are down?" meaning, "are you downstairs?" He always had time to visit and would welcome me with a joyful laugh, "Come, come. Sit down, sit." Frequently he would interject our conversations with his familiar, "No ya, no ya." When you told him good news he would say, "Praise the Lord for that." When he had a request, whether it was a prayer or your own penance, he would say, "Be so kind...one Hail Holy Queen, ya? Be so kind." He would say who had been over to visit him, "There was here Creagan." Not Fr. Creagan, not Mike Creagan, not Mike, it was Creagan (with a rolled "R"). Fr. Tim Deutsch was Timmy. Fr. Moriarty was "that one who was always fixing on his car," referring to his time in the seminary, when Fr. Kubat would watch him out of his window working on his car. Fr. Gallatin was "the one who is out by you" (In Delano). I think he

referred to me as Mike Miller. And if he was trying to recall something you could be sure you would hear, "Moment, moment." He would make observations, "Ya, ya, the cassocks that are coming in the mail are still looking nice." And before I left I could be sure that I would hear, "Say hello to your parents." My parents recalled that while he still lived in the area they always knew when he was driving by. Our farm was in a valley. He would start honking the horn on his Jeep at the top of one hill and continue honking it until he was on top of the other. When I left I would ask for his blessing, which he always gave in Latin, and then, after I was ordained, he would ask for mine. I always felt unworthy giving it, but confident that its fruitfulness came from the same source as his: the sacrament of Holy Orders.

He loved that sacrament. He loved them all. With great joy he would hear my confession. Always there was the advice to entrust myself to Jesus Christ and His Blessed Mother. "They will help you. Say to them you must help me." His love of confession was surpassed only by his love of the Mass. Fr. Tim

Deutsch (Timmy) said it so well many years ago, "When he offers the Mass, you know he is praying to God." His example and that observation impressed me deeply. Fr. Kubat knew what the Mass was: the re-presentation of the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, and he knew that it was through the priesthood that this takes place. The priest acts in the Person of Christ who transforms the bread and wine into His very Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity. Fr. Kubat understood this and always acted accordingly. Even the things used for Mass mattered greatly to him. When it was the fashion to use pottery for the sacred vessels, he would sweep his hand and say, "ah...my dog eats from a better dish than that." He only wanted the best for Christ. It is a significant testament from one who was forced to use a tin spoon for a chalice. He would say, "We buy ourselves nice things, should we not have nice things for the Lord?"

He loved to pray. He knew he was speaking to God, and through it coming to know and love Him more deeply. God was real and he knew Him as a Person. He knew each Person of the Holy Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He loved each of them, and he knew that he was loved by them. How fitting it was that the longest pastorate of his life was at Most Holy Trinity. Mary was intrinsic to his prayer. He knew that she led him in prayer and taught him how to know and love God. The last piece of spiritual advice that he gave me was to see how Mary loved the Most Holy Trinity, and how they loved her and you. He said to say the Angelus, and dedicate the first Hail Mary to the Father, the second to the Son, and the third to the Holy Spirit. To another person he said, "Everyday say three times, Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, have mercy on us." I remember him doing this at the end of Mass right after saying, "Mary, refuge of sinners, Pray for us. Comforter of the afflicted, Pray for us. Help of Christians, Pray for us." The rosary and his devotion to the divine office were

outstanding. When he thought he was going to die he prayed the office for the next day just in case. His friends took up the duty for him in his last couple of days.

Like everyone else I will miss Fr. Kubat. But that sadness is overshadowed by my joy for him. Imagine the reward of this faithful servant of God. He died shortly after the Feast of Mary, the Mother of God. It was on the memorial of St. Basil and St. Gregory, two men from the East renown for their wisdom and holiness – very much as he was to us. My last visit with him was on Christmas day. It was much the same as the others though there were three differences. Somehow I knew it would be the last time we would speak (a week later he could not), he told me the details of his life, which I wrote down. And after dinner we did something that we never did before. He said, “We will have beer.” He had a bottle of Staropramen, brewed in Prague. He poured into two glasses and after toasting we drank it. “It is better warm,” he said. “You can taste the flavors better.” I wonder if he could taste the flavor of his homeland. If it recalled the good memories that not even the Nazis or the Communists could erase. Whatever the case, I know that his heart was always set on our true homeland that is not of this earth. The words of the “O Salutaris” sum up his life so well: “O Saving Victim op’ning wide, the gate of Heav’n to us below! Our foes press on from ev’ry side: Your aid supply, your strength bestow. To your great name be endless praise, Immortal Godhead, One in Three; O grant us endless length of days, when our true native land we see.”

In the Gospel we heard Jesus say: “Father, they are your gift to me. I wish that where I am they also may be with me, that they may see my glory that you gave me, because you loved me before the foundation of the world” (John 17: 24). In his breviary Fr. Kubat had this prayer which so beautiful corresponds to the prayer of Jesus. I am sure that on January 2, 2006, both prayers were answered. “I am nearing a hundred, my day draws to a close; it is more than evening, it is almost night. But, in front of me, rises in the east the dawn of a more beautiful day, Welcome, welcome! It is the white light of your face, O Christ, which in my sad heart awakens a great hope. Come down, heavenly ray. Appear, my Brother, Jesus. It is time for us to see each other.”