

**Fr. Brendan McGuire's Homily delivered at Bishop P.J McGrath's  
Memorial Mass, May 17, 2023  
St. Francis Cabrini Parish, San Jose**

**I AM The Way, the Truth and the Life**

*I am the way, the truth and the life.*

Bishop P.J. absolutely and completely believed those words.

This was his gospel of all gospels

—and there was place in his Father's house for him.

He lived these words completely and abundantly in own life.

Even more so in those last day when he died peacefully.

He was so gracious about dying, it was so powerful witness to his faith.

So many of us got to witness that over his last few days.

When he had the surgery and he was recovering,

and he that pneumonia in his first lung.

I had spent an hour with him and he was determined to recover.

We chatted about all our shared ministry together,

making him laugh at some of the old times.

He would cough and complain I was trying to kill him!

But the next day he got the news

that the pneumonia had spread to his other lung

and there was nothing more that the doctors could do.

Yet, he was very peaceful about it.

When I got back to the hospital and chatted with him,

He said, "Brendan, actually I'm fine with this.

I'm ready to go to my Father's house.

Now can I have a piece of chocolate!"

And he got a piece of chocolate.

Bishop P.J. died as he lived:

full of grace, humor and faith till his last breath.

I would like to focus my reflections in thanksgiving for his life

on those three character traits: grace, humor and faith.

He want to preach in that three-fold manner

because he was a closet Jesuit and the Jesuits always preach in three points.

I want to hone that Jesuit inside of him!

Grace: P.J. was always grace-filled in every moment.

Every one of us present here today

know how gracious and kind he always was, almost to a fault.

He was always gracious, kind, gentle, compassion and loving to all.

We priests were sharing earlier in the week at Clergy Study Week

and Fr. Sergio, one of his priest-friends, sharing that he went too far

and he would be taken advantage of.

I remember he would say,

“Yeah. Yeah. I know. That’s okay.

But I would rather be too kind than too harsh.

Brendan, you might try it.

It might work for you.”

It was one of his superpowers—grace and kindness.

He had the remarkable gift of going into a room full of people,

somehow he would figure out who needed attention the most

and he would go to that person or group

and make him feel special,

whether it was kitchen staff, other servers, children,

or a person hurting from a loss,

then he would make them feel special.

He had a way of making everyone feel special.

he would assure them of God’s love for them.

But his love and gentleness was genuine,

straight from the heart.

It was truly authentic.

He did not have to try.

It just came out of him naturally.

A chance meeting with P.J. would end in a lifelong friendship.

Everybody left him as his special friend.

That is why this Church is so full today!

He loved to go to visit schools as it got him out of the office.

Then he would visit each classroom and say to them,

“Boys and girls, I am going to tell you a secret

—you are my favorite class.

But don’t tell the others.”

Then he would go into the next class and say the same thing!

He had this gift to be gracious in all circumstances.

He was also gracious afterwards and you would get a note in the mail.

While his secretary, Pat Allen would get them ready for him,

he would always have personally signed them

and always write a some handwritten personal note.

He wasn’t just me but everyone got a handwritten note,

everyone got it from him because he genuinely cared about you.

He might mention your parents, spouse, or other loss;

He was truly grace-filled to the last moment.

Msgr. Willie at our meetings these last days quoted Maya Angelou

and it was one of P.J.’s favorite quotes and used it often:

“People will not remember what you said,

people will not remember what you did,

but people will remember how you made them feel.”

My friend P.J., my bishop, our friend, our bishop P.J.

you made us feel special, all of us all the time.

You made us feel loved and you were gracious in doing that.

Now to his humor.

He was a master of using humor with his born-dry Irish wit.

But you have to be careful as you could get the wrong end of it.

He had an amazing gift of being able to disarm a roomful of hostile people with a single joke or story .

He would use self-deprecating humor to disarm the difficult situations.

I remember one story which was one of his favorites

and he told over and over again because he loved it.

It was when we had Auxiliary Bishop Tom Daley here

and P.J. was unable to make a function.  
So he sent Bishop Tom to go in his place.  
As Bishop Tom got up to give the invocation,  
a little old lady in the front row who was hard of hearing said,  
in not such a quiet voice,  
“Is that a new bishop?  
When did the big one die!”  
Bishop Tom drove over to Bishop P.J.’s house just to tell him that story.  
P.J. love to tell that story—he thought it was hilarious.  
He used to joke with us at the office  
that he told it too often and we would put on his tombstone.  
“The big one lies here.”  
P.J., the big one has died,  
but rest reassured we will not put it on your grave  
but we will put it in our hearts  
—for the big one is in our hearts forever because you loved us.

He never lost his humor even on his last day.  
The night before he died, Saturday night,  
I was with him and his best friend, Msgr. Dan Weldon with nurse Karen,  
and we were awaiting the arrival of his nephew Patrick from New York.  
He wanted to receive anointing with the commendation of the dying  
or last rites as it is known, from Dan before he died.  
We were getting him prepared for this moment as it is beautiful but hard.  
So I asked him, “Do you want to do the commendation now  
or after Patrick gets here?”  
He said, “Well, I thought that we could wait till Patrick gets here  
and then I could chat a little with Patrick  
and chat with some family back home in Ireland one last time.  
Would that be okay or do you want me to die right now?”  
“No. P.J. that’s okay. We can wait.  
No need to die right now!”  
Humor right up till the last moment.  
It was an emotional time calling everyone back home  
as it was 7am in the morning back in Ireland

and we eventually gave him the commendation.  
Trying to ease difficulty of that moment, Patrick asked him,  
“Uncle P.J., how did Msgr. do with the anointing?”  
He answered immediately,  
“Alright, I suppose. Not bad! But a bit long.”  
And he look directly at Dan and asked, “Did you use the long version?”  
Dan responded, “P.J. I used the proper version!”  
P.J. retorted, “Yeah! I thought so. He used the long version.  
I thought I was going to die before you finish.”  
Humor to his last breath!  
You have to understand that was P.J. the whole way!  
Right until his last breath, he was full of humor, full of life.  
The reason why could done that  
was because he was full of faith.  
There was no shadow of doubt in that man’s mind  
about where he was going.

#### Faith.

There’s no question that he is a man of profound faith.  
He hear in today’s first reading  
that Abram left his land, relatives and friends  
went where the Lord asked him to go.  
So too did P.J.— he left everything, family, friends, and land  
faithfully served in his Father’s House for his entire life  
in the Church of San Francisco.  
While he believed, loved and served the church,  
P.J.’s first love was Jesus.  
He truly believed that Jesus was the way, the truth and the life.  
We hear today the dialogue of Jesus with his closest disciples  
assuring them that he is going to prepare a place for them  
in his Father’s house.  
P.J. never doubted for one minute  
that he was going to his Father’s house.  
That’s why he could be so full of humor and grace,  
because he never worried where he was going himself

or anybody of faith for that matter.

He believed completely in God's love and God's mercy.

P.J. had a deep passion for reading and was well-read.

His depth and breadth of knowledge was extraordinary.

But he had a proclivity to the Irish authors  
and in particular he loved John O'Donohue,  
the great Irish writer, poet and theologian.

I'll finish with what O'Donohue says of death and dying,

"We often told that the physical body holds the soul,  
so when the body dies where does the soul go, we ask."

O'Donohue adds, "But we believe that the soul contains the body.

When the body dies the soul lives forever  
and continues the journey home to the Lord.

In that way, the deathbed is a special and sacred place,  
and it is more an altar than a bed

where we offer up the flesh and blood of a life of our loved  
and it is transformed into eternal spirit."

O'Donohue then summarizes the Christian journey as this,

"When we are born we become a traveler from the invisible to the visible.

Then we move through this life.

When we die we become a traveler again  
and move from the visible to the invisible.

We are no longer bound by space or location.

We become part of God and pure love."

Yes, P.J. truly believed in eternal life

and his soul will live forever,

and his love will remain forever with us.

He was a man of profound faith,

and we are deeply grateful for the love that he is shared with us.

I want to conclude with something this:

he concluded every confirmation service.

He used to remind the confirmandi:

"Boys and girls, if you remember nothing else

from what I said today, remember this.  
You are loved by God.  
Yes loved.  
In all your weirdness and strangeness.  
You are loved.  
If anyone else tells you otherwise, they are liars.  
Yes liars.  
Remember that you are loved by God.”

Well, P.J., I say to you today  
If you remember nothing else from us today,  
you are loved by God  
in all your weirdness and wonderfulness.  
Yes you are loved God and us.

My friend, May the road rise to meet you.  
May the sun shine warm upon your face.  
May the wind be on your back  
May the rain fall softly upon your fields  
And until we meet again, may God hold you in his hand.  
May God welcome you home to your eternal rest.  
Rest in peace P.J. my friend.  
We love you.