

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Funeral Mass for Archbishop Harry J. Flynn

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Seventh Archbishop of Saint Paul and Minneapolis

St. Paul Cathedral

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The Premise

Let me remind you of the premise upon which this homily is based. Like hundreds of alumni of Mt. St. Mary's Seminary in Emmitsburg, Maryland, I happily and proudly claim Archbishop Harry J. Flynn as my Rector. Fr. Flynn, as he was known then, led Mt. St. Mary's Seminary from 1970 until 1979. Long after I was ordained, I habitually addressed Archbishop Flynn as "Father Rector", and he habitually addressed me as "Student Lori". I'm fairly sure he was happy that his former student became Archbishop of Baltimore; I'm even more certain that he really liked the fact that I have a dog, a golden retriever. When I had two dogs, unlike Archbishop Flynn, I did not name them "Meagan" or "Katie" but "Barnes and Noble" - it just seemed to work better for me!

Discussing this very homily with Archbishop Hebda, we recalled that in 1990 then-Bishop Flynn of the Diocese of Lafayette-in-Louisiana served as a delegate to the month-long Synod of Bishops in Rome dedicated to priestly formation. That synod and the papal document that followed it are notable for bringing clearly into focus the four dimensions of priestly formation: human formation; spiritual formation; intellectual formation; and pastoral formation. Archbishop Hebda observed that, long before these four dimensions of formation were so clearly spelled out, Archbishop Flynn embodied them and lived them until the end of his life. Recognizing that Archbishop Hebda was inspired by the Holy Spirit, I promptly stole his idea, and made it the outline of everything I will henceforth say!

The Human Dimension

Seeing Archbishop Flynn through the lens of human formation, let's begin with this: Archbishop Flynn was a wonderful human being. He was warm; he had a great sense of humor; he never forgot a name or a face; and he wrote out his Christmas cards in July – always with a personal note inside. I remember moving in on my first day at Mt. St. Mary's Seminary. I had met my roommate, got unpacked, and was walking down the hall when I heard, from behind me, Father Flynn's distinctive voice call out, "Mr. Lori!" I thought to myself, "How does he know my name already? And how did he recognize me from the back?" I soon realized that by the time all 170 seminarians had walked through the door, Father Flynn could recognize each of us at sight, front and back, and call our names. All of us here today appreciate that wonderful gift God gave to Archbishop Flynn. It's not just that he remembered our names. He also knew us and loved us. He had a tremendous capacity for hospitality and friendship, a capacity that created a true sense of community and camaraderie, not only in the seminary, but also in the parishes and dioceses where he served so effectively.

Archbishop Flynn also maintained a sense of humor, even when rightfully irritated. In my second year at the Mount, my room was directly above Father Flynn's rooms. On a Sunday afternoon, I was busily writing a term paper on a large and noisy electric typewriter, placed on a rickety typing table, with no carpet on the floor – it must have sounded like a jackhammer down below. By and by there was a knock at my door whereupon Father Flynn entered. "Yes, Father Rector!" said I, to which he replied, "Mr. Lori, if you don't stop typing, I'll be forced to break both of your arms!"

Throughout his ministry, whether as a seminary rector or a bishop, Archbishop Flynn demonstrated an uncommon degree of common sense. When we seminarians were in a kerfuffle about some problem or controversy, Father Flynn would calm the waters and help us see what was important and what wasn't and then, re-focus us on our responsibilities. At a time when seminary formation was in flux and there was a lot of confusion, Father Flynn kept us focused on the essentials of priestly formation, with a primary emphasis on prayer, on building community, and on pastoral charity. Like the "souls of the just" described in today's reading from the Book of Wisdom, the Archbishop entrusted his many responsibilities and burdens to the Lord, confident that he was safe in God's hands, confident that life's chastisements, whether they be illness or controversy, were signs of God's love and a crucible for

the purification of his mind and heart. Is it any wonder that Archbishop Flynn was deeply loved, wherever he served, by members of the laity, by his priests and deacons, by seminarians, and by religious. Truly, his humanity was a bridge to Christ.

Spiritual Formation

Let's now look at Archbishop Flynn through the lens of spiritual formation. You know, when you enter a seminary, you expect those in charge to tell you about the importance of prayer, the types of prayer, and the ways to pray. But nothing substitutes for the power of good example. Every afternoon at 4:00 o'clock or so, Father Flynn could be seen sitting in front of the Blessed Sacrament at St. Bernard's Chapel at the Mount. Busy as he was with all of us and much more, he was never too busy to pray. "Give me eight hours of sleep at night and an hour before the Blessed Sacrament," he often said, "and I will do anything the Church asks of me." Whether at the Mount, or in Lafayette, or here in the Twin Cities, or in his beloved home on Schroon Lake in upstate New York, prayer was the golden thread that ran through the life of this great priest and bishop.

Small wonder that Archbishop Flynn chose for his Funeral Mass a passage from the Bread of Life discourse in John's Gospel, where Jesus reveals himself both as the source of divine wisdom, but above all, as our true food and drink. For it is by partaking of Christ's Body and Blood in the Eucharist that we share more deeply in his saving Death and Resurrection, and in his intimate and mutual relationship of love with the Father, that love who is the Holy Spirit. Archbishop Flynn passionately believed in the mystery of the Eucharist and truly centered his life on the Eucharistic Lord. He knew that everything flows from prayer, from our relationship with God, His experience taught him that the Eucharist really is the source & summit of our life, as individuals and as communities of faith, whether a parish, a diocese, or a seminary. And because of his life of prayer, is it any wonder that this Archdiocese is blessed with an abundance of wonderful priestly vocations!

Intellectual Formation

Now a look at Archbishop Flynn through the lens of intellectual formation, beginning with this observation: he taught us students not to take ourselves too seriously! He

wanted us to study and to excel in our studies but not to imagine that we were the next bright light for which the Church was waiting with bated breath. In a word, he expected academic achievement to be tempered with humility, humility before the God who is the Source of all wisdom and truth. Archbishop Flynn would not have thought of himself as a theologian but as anyone who heard him preach can attest, he had a wealth of stories, a powerful command of Scripture, of the English language, and of literature and used those gifts with great skill to communicate the Good News of salvation. What's more, he was one of the few people I ever met who truly knew the difference between a metaphor and a simile!

If Archbishop Flynn's own gifts were more practical than speculative he nonetheless appreciated the contributions of theologians whether in his role as rector or in his involvement with Catholic higher education, including St. Thomas University and The Catholic University of America. He taught us, or tried to teach us, as seminarians not to leap too quickly to conclusions about the soundness or lack of soundness of any one author or opinion, but rather to think things through calmly and prayerfully...lessons of a lifetime!

Pastoral Formation

Let us take a concluding look at Archbishop Flynn's life through the critically important lens of pastoral formation. In this we are guided by St. Peter's first letter where we read, "Tend the flock of God in your midst, not by constraint but willingly ... and not for shameful profit but eagerly." Could there be a better description of Archbishop Flynn's ministry here & elsewhere? He was a wise and loving shepherd after the heart of the Chief Shepherd, the Christ. As such he knew that truth and love are friends, not enemies. He knew the importance of mercy, hospitality, listening to others, knowing them, and the importance of being present to his people in their hour of need. His was the voice you wanted to hear when discouragement set in or when illness struck or when a seemingly insurmountable problem loomed. His was a voice that enabled so many to find consolation, direction, and strength in the green pastures of God's love, just as the Good Shepherd himself promised.

As our Rector, Archbishop Flynn taught us, or at least tried to teach us, the importance of listening to the people we were sent to serve; the importance of

gentleness and understanding in our ministry, recognizing God's gifts and the working of the Holy Spirit in others, and the unimportance of our personal plans in the face of any pastoral need. Long after Archbishop Flynn retired he continued to confirm, to say Mass in parishes, to visit the sick, to give retreats to seminarians and priests, and much, much more. To my mind, he was a priest's priest and a bishop's bishop. I don't need to tell anyone in St. Paul and Minneapolis or in Lafayette how blessed you were to have Archbishop Harry J. Flynn as your shepherd!

A Concluding Word

No discussion of Archbishop Flynn's life would be complete without mentioning his warm and loving devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Because his life was centered on the Christ of the Eucharist, so too his heart was warmed by Mary's maternal love. Daily, through the mysteries of the Rosary, Mary led him to Jesus.

And because he was close to Jesus and to his Mother, Archbishop Flynn would want us who celebrate his life never to forget to pray for him and to pray for the happy repose of his soul. With so much love we commend you, Father Rector, Archbishop Flynn, to the Lord of life and love, to the Chief Shepherd whom you served so well. May your great high priestly soul rest in the peace of Christ. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!