

Cherish Gifts of Service

In my four-plus years as Archbishop of Baltimore, I don't recall ever seeing the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen in Homeland as full as it was on the morning of Tuesday, Dec. 6.

Very many major Archdiocesan liturgies occur at the Cathedral. Significant ecumenical and interfaith services have been celebrated there, and it is the House of God chosen to host large funerals for Catholic and non-Catholic Marylanders, from athletes and politicians to fallen soldiers, fire, police and other emergency personnel.

Yet it was the funeral of a high school literature teacher, a man who had only been in the Archdiocese 10 years, that packed the pews and aisles of the cavernous church.

An estimated 2,000 people came to say goodbye to Brother James Kelly, President of Mount St. Joseph High School, an all-boys Catholic school in Irvington sponsored by the Xaverian Brothers. Brother James would, I suspect, identify himself not as an administrator, but as a teacher (he taught honors British literature). From the outpouring of support, he clearly leaves behind a legacy many of us could only strive to earn from a lifetime of service.

I was the privileged main celebrant of the Mass, joined by many priests including a number of priest-alumni of the school.

Among others present for the funeral were more than 1,000 students who attend Mount St. Joe, many of them standing three deep in both side aisles of the Cathedral for the entirety of the two-hour Mass. They, like the rest of those present, listened in remarkable attention as Father Chris Whatley, the priest-confessor of the Brother for many years, offered one of the finest homilies in my memory.

Recalling many meaningful conversations with Brother James, Father Whatley repeated the words the Xaverian Brother told to a former student struggling to find his way. "Stay close to Christ ... and life's meaning will become clear." Words Brother James clearly lived by.

Barry Fitzpatrick, the school's principal and a longtime friend of Brother James, also spoke at the Mass.

"As one of our own said recently, he is one of those rare individuals who cannot be replaced, and we shall not try to do so. What we shall try to do, with every fabric of our being, is to honor the legacy he has left us at his Mount, and we shall try to march on, as he would say, in the face of this loss," Fitzpatrick said.

Xaverian Brother Arthur R. Caliman said of his classmate: "He loved being a teacher more than anything else. The classroom was where he most wanted to be - even in his final days ... whether lecturing on his favorite prose or poetry in British literature, mentoring young teachers, correcting papers in writing or on tape, he was always teaching beyond and beneath the curriculum. He was always 'handing on the faith,' which was what he taught most and best."

Brother James' extraordinary impact in a relative short period of time is a poignant reminder of the influence and reach of our Catholic school teachers and administrators.

We lost another such educator recently in Theodore "Ted" Thormann. A math teacher at Calvert Hall for more than 30 years, Ted's sudden death just before Thanksgiving shook the Calvert Hall community and left the school, much like Mount St. Joseph, with a sense of great loss.

"He was a dedicated teacher ... was well liked by his students [who] respected his expertise and his willingness to always be available to help them," Principal Lou Heidrick said. "He was in his classroom a little after 7 a.m. each morning and would work with students until it was time to start classes for the day."

It has been my experience that many of those working in our Catholic schools strive to serve in the manner of the Brother Jameses and Ted Thormanns. Our teachers and administrators go the extra mile because they care about the children they teach and view their work as a ministry, an opportunity to share their God-given gifts with tomorrow's leaders.

"I attended both funerals - Ted Thormann's and Brother James Kelly's," Heidrick

added. "I was struck by the great influence teachers have on their students. The outpouring of affection for their teachers was extraordinary."

Of course, the contributions to our Church are many and varied and extend beyond the halls of our schools.

Though not as well known and his work much less visible than the educators I have mentioned, Charlie Fogle was no less dependable, no less important.

Charlie was the longtime Building Superintendent at the Catholic Center here in downtown Baltimore. Charlie retired last year after nearly a quarter-century of service, meticulously caring for the building that houses 175 employees of the Archdiocese and Catholic Charities.

"He knew the building like a great musician knows an instrument," Nolan McCoy, director of Facilities and Real Estate, said. "He had complete knowledge of every switch, pipe, valve and breaker in his mind and did not need to look at drawings and schematics. ... He cared about the building and the people who worked inside it and visited the Catholic Center every day during his years of employment, even on weekends and holidays when the building was closed ... to make sure that everything was working properly."

Like Brother James and Ted Thormann, Charlie went far beyond what was asked of him in the normal course of his job. He saw his work as more than a job and in utilizing his gifts as he did, gave glory to the God who bestowed such talents upon him.

Charlie and his wife, Jean, had recently purchased a cabin in the woods near Deep Creek Lake, where the two planned to live out his retirement years. Sadly, Charlie soon died from a short but painful battle with cancer. He is certainly missed by those of us who worked with him.

Charlie's work, though largely anonymous to Catholics outside the Catholic Center, is typical of the selfless service of so many in our parishes, schools and other institutions for which we find ourselves so grateful this time of year.