

Deacon Flamini lived call to service



Deacon Michael Flamini prays at his May 17, 2003 ordination at the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen in Homeland. (CR File)

When Redemptorist Father Robert Wojtek invited mourners to pray the Our Father at the end of a short prayer service the day before Deacon Michael Flamini was laid to rest, a beautiful cacophony emerged inside Kaczorowski Funeral Home in Dundalk.

About half the congregation prayed in Spanish while the rest spoke the words in English – the ebbs and flows of the familiar prayer’s rhythms interflowing between the two languages.

It was a touching and fitting tribute to a man who gave his life to both communities.

Raised in the East Baltimore neighborhood of Little Italy, Deacon Flamini answered a call to religious life and was ordained to the permanent diaconate May 17, 2003.

Wanting to reach out to the Spanish-speaking immigrant community, he learned Spanish and became a much-loved figure at the bilingual Catholic Community of St. Michael and St. Patrick in Fells Point – the parish he served throughout his ministry until St. Michael closed in July and its parishioners (along with Deacon Flamini) relocated to Sacred Heart of Jesus in Highlandtown.

I knew Deacon Flamini for the eight years he was at St. Michael and St. Patrick. At the end of the 4 p.m. Saturday Mass each week, he always stood at the church door greeting every person who passed through. He wouldn’t make an attempt to lock up until everyone who wanted to talk had a chance and until every last laugh from his many jokes had subsided.

In his homily at Deacon Flamini’s Sept. 30 funeral, held at the 62-year-old deacon’s family parish of St. Leo in Little Italy, Father Wojtek recalled how his friend helped in the RCIA program and later taught catechism lessons to First Communicants. Deacon Flamini showed a spirit of welcome to all, no matter their race, age,

language or ethnicity.

Father Wojtek, former pastor of St. Michael/St. Patrick and current pastor of Sacred Heart of Jesus, recalled Deacon Flamini's quick wit and sense of humor. Few believed the deacon, the priest said, when Deacon Flamini joked that his girlfriend was Jennifer Lopez. Once, Father Wojtek remembered, Deacon Flamini asked children if anyone among them had ever considered becoming a priest. After one boy raised his hand, Deacon Flamini informed him that priests are not allowed to get married.

"That's fine," the boy replied, "because women always make me late for everything."

More than any specific task that Deacon Flamini completed, Father Wojtek said, it was his constant presence that made him so beloved.

"He set up for Mass as the deacons did in the early days of the Church," Father Wojtek said. "He greeted people as they did. As deacons of the early Church knew people by name, he knew people by name and by need."

During his homilies, which he preached in English and Spanish, Deacon Flamini often encouraged Catholics to love one another. Sometimes he challenged his congregation to be more welcoming to immigrants or to take a stand in defense of the sanctity of life. If he could find a way to incorporate some lessons from his favorite saint, Padre Pio, he would.

"He was a just man," Father Wojtek said. "He was a part of us precisely because he first belonged to God and sought to serve God to the best of his ability."

Deacon Flamini, like so many other good people in our church, was unheralded in life. As his good friend, Deacon Richard Novak pointed out, Deacon Flamini "always put other people first" and "never tried to outshine anyone."

Deacon Flamini's sudden death when he still had so much to give was a shock. Yet, Father Wojtek reminds us that there is more to life than what is lived on Earth.

"At a time like this," he said, "Mike himself would be one of the first to remind us not to question, but to console – not to doubt, but to deepen our faith. We are invited

to proclaim, 'Yes, Lord, we believe you are the resurrection. We believe you are the life.'"

Rest in peace, friend.