

Reflections on Monsignor Jack Collopy

By Father Isaac Karoor

On the Sunday before Father Jack Collopy passed onto eternity I celebrated Holy Mass in his room. He and I concelebrated; he wore his favorite golden color stole. Dan, his nephew, and Dan's wife Kim and Linda, Jack's niece, sat around the makeshift altar. They assisted with the readings and the responsorial psalm.

Jack and I had Eucharistic celebrations in historic places including St. Peters in the Vatican, the shrine of the Infant of Prague, the Greek city of Corinth and in Oberamgau in Germany when we went there for the Passion-Play. The Mass in his room was the last one Jack celebrated.

Just as we were vesting, Linda gave me some pictures which she just took out from Father Jack's album. One was the picture of him visiting my mother in India. Ironically, that trip of his to my homeland was one I could not go with him. He told me that though my mother could not speak a word in English, her smile and the way she welcomed him and ministered to him was an unforgettable experience for him.

My mother and Father Jack will remain as the most important two individuals in my life. My mother gave me life and Jack gave me new life. My mother, whom God chose to give me life, also had an exceptional role in sustaining my vocation to the priesthood. In this adopted country of mine where I have spent the second half of my life so far, Father Jack was chosen by God to give me new life. Three months ago when my mother died, Jack comforted me, and now when I lost him, the presence of all of you here is a great comfort to me. His demise is a great loss to his family and the hundreds whose life he made stronger spiritually.

A primary duty of ours tonight is to entrust Father Jack's soul to the Lord and to console and strengthen Father Jack's family. Linda and Dan, I have great appreciation for the exceptional affection with which you took care of Father Jack. Almost every day you were with him visiting and taking care of him. May the Lord lessen your grief and continue to bless your family abundantly. Having gone to meet the Lord face to face, Jack is more powerful henceforth to obtain blessings for you and for all of us than while he lived with us in his body.

Let me explain how Father Jack became vitally important in my life. During the Prayer of the Faithful during the Mass Linda prayed that Uncle Jack's wounds may be healed. What she meant might have been his physical wounds resulting from

prolonged stay in bed. But her prayer for his wounds reminded me of Jack as a wounded healer. Literally he became for me the hands and the heart of Jesus, the Wounded Healer par excellence. Jack, while in ministry, suffered mental depression and was healed. In my 35th year when I came to this country I was a depressed man. My depression had occurred as a gradual process. The joy and enthusiasm which energized the first years of my priestly ministry had declined. It was then, in the tenth year after my ordination that I came to the States. Upon arrival here, adding to my stress was the struggle of adjusting to an inner city parish. While a priest in residence at St. Matthew rectory at Northwood in Baltimore I felt as nothing more than a zombie. Worse still, my spiritual life was dying out like a flame which no longer has fuel.

I had to take a number of sleeping pills to get an hour's sleep. I had stopped celebrating Mass for quite a while when Father Jack came as pastor of St. Matthew's. The reason for my decline was not because I was a moron. I studied in a major seminary run by Italian Jesuits who had adopted that region in India as their mission province. During the first two years of my priesthood I was the priest secretary to the major Archbishop in the regional capital of my home state, Kerala. Then I became a pastor of three mission stations. I was on the Archdiocesan board of Education. I became rector of a residential high school with over two hundred students boarding. But when I became depressed, I began to lose everything that I cherished in my life.

At the rectory in St. Mathew's one day the housekeeper said to me, "Father Isaac, you make your bed exactly the way I do." "Let me tell you the reason, Marion," I said, "It's because I do not make the bed, I just sleep on top of the bedcover." I had no friends, no salary, no car, no driver's license, no health insurance and no future I could foresee. I had lost hope. All I did was try to sleep and pray for an early ending of my life.

A turn around to my miserable plight took place during a Mass celebrated by Father Jack. That day he invited me to sit by his side at the altar as he was presiding. It was a Sunday when the Gospel was Jesus asking his disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" Explaining the passage I heard him describing how Jesus gave him new life and how he was healed from his depression. Toward the end of the Mass I asked Lord Jesus to heal me also. Though I had lost everything I never had lost the faith. Though I had cursed everything imaginable as the Prophet Jeremiah did when he was in trouble, I never forgot the Lord. This is what I said to the Lord that day, "My Lord and my God today I accept you as my healer."

That prayer that day was the beginning of the new beginning. Arranged by Father Jack, I went for counseling, started taking courses in St. Mary's University and increasingly began to get involved in parish activities. Finally, when it was time for

me to move on to another parish there was a farewell Mass for me. The new pastor Father Wayne Funk, while he was the Clergy Personnel Director, who was also a priest in residence at St. Matthews when I arrived there said, "In all my pastoral experience I had not seen such a long line waiting to bid goodbye to a priest." Father Wayne had seen me as a basket case when arrived there. It was Father Jack who turned me into a basket of blessings for people.

I made mention of a number of Masses during my reflection. Indeed Father Jack's greatest contribution to me is my renewed devotion to the Eucharist. He was a wounded healer who reached out to me with compassion. Many of my philosophy and theology classes were in Latin; I know the etymological meaning of compassion is to "suffer with."

Jack did not look down upon me, instead he suffered with me. He loved priesthood so much that he could not watch silently when a fellow priest was losing it. I do not think I can do the same for someone with half the compassion he had. That is why he ranks very high in the ladder of the most important persons in my life.

Thank you Jack for all you have done for me. In order to thank you adequately I need an eternity. You pray that I get there with you. I conclude with the prayer based on the one in the Eucharistic prayer, "May the body and blood of Christ keep us all safe for eternal life."

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