

Remembering Valenzano

Monsignor

As my sister's matron of honor, I had several responsibilities on the altar at her wedding. I had to adjust the bride's train on her dress, hold the bouquet, adjust the train again, head down the aisle to bring up the gifts, hand back the bouquet, and adjust the train again.

At the sign of peace, the two concelebrating priests came over to shake my hand, and one of them greeted me with a big smile.

"We're keeping you busy up here," he said. "You're doing a wonderful job."

Here I had thought I was invisible. And, to almost everyone else in the church, I was. But not to Msgr. Art Valenzano, who noticed and connected with everyone he met.



Msgr. Valenzano, third from left, at Treasa and George Matysek's wedding

When I learned today that **he had passed away at 66 after his battle with cancer**, I thought of him in that moment—how he went out of his way to connect with me, to make me feel seen and valued. What a gift he was to our community—and to every single person he encountered. He was a man of God, a priest who demonstrated the love of Christ, a true light shining through the darkness.

At the time I knew Msgr. Valenzano only by reputation. That was my first exchange with him. To be honest, I would have guessed it would be our last.

Then not quite a year later my sister and brother-in-law **lost their son, Georgie**, when he was stillborn at 34 weeks. The night Georgie was born, I drove to the hospital to see them, praying on the drive that I would find the strength and the words to be with them in that moment.

I was in a mental fog as I arrived at the parking garage at Johns Hopkins. But as I approached the elevators to head into the hospital, I saw a man walking toward me. He was clearly focused on his own thoughts—or, more likely, he was deep in prayer. But I recognized him. And I felt obligated to thank him for coming.

"Monsignor," I said, and he turned. I re-introduced myself and he greeted me with compassion and concern. You would have thought I was just the person he wanted to see, yet another person who needed his emotional support at this late hour in a dimly lit parking garage.

As we spoke about Georgie and his parents, he showed such spiritual strength, courage, love, and a sense of peace.

I don't remember what he said. I just know that when I left his side and headed into the hospital to hold my nephew for the first and last time, I felt prepared. I have always been grateful to him for that conversation—and for his support of Georgie's parents and my whole family during that time of grieving.

Msgr. Valenzano and I were not friends. He knew me only through my sister and brother-in-law. But he was one of those people who, through his presence, his strength, his concern, and his serving as an instrument of Christ's love, managed to have an impact on me—and on so many others who knew him better.

My brother-in-law shares a reflection on Msgr. Valenzano here.