

Simply put, he was a good man

By Father Robert Wojtek, C.Ss.R.

It had been a busy Saturday. To top things off, we had two parties going on the same night: one in the church hall and the other in the school hall. Just as they were about to get into full swing, I received a message: Samuel was very sick; he was at St. Joseph Medical Center in Towson. I blessed the food for the one party and told the folks to pray for Samuel, that I was going to the hospital and would be back later. A hush came over the crowd. Everyone knew and loved Samuel.

As I anointed him that night, I knew his chances were slim. In fact, the following Monday morning I received word of his passing. The news spread like wildfire throughout the community. Two days later, when I arrived at the funeral home in the middle of the afternoon, the parking lot was already full. One of the funeral directors asked me: "Who was this man?" He could not believe the constant stream of people and the tremendous outpourings of love shown to Samuel and to his family. That same gentleman would later mention that in all his 27 years working at that funeral home, he had never witnessed such crowds.

The funeral Mass was incredibly full even more so considering that it was a weekday. As I stood at the gravesite waiting for the folks to gather, I counted at least 87 vehicles from the funeral procession - there were many more but, due to a hill, I could not see them all. Without a doubt, this was the largest funeral I had ever participated in for a layperson. Among prayers, songs, tears and flowers, we bid Samuel farewell.

So just who was Samuel and why this tremendous show of affection and respect? Why did hundreds of people - English speakers as well as Spanish speakers - file by his coffin? And why so many strong young men who openly cried - even wailed - as they paid their respects to Samuel? Simply put, Samuel was a good man.

He would take at least two buses on a Sunday morning from Cockeysville to make it to Fells Point in time to play the guitar and sing at the Mass in Spanish. Samuel came here 25 years ago; he was a pioneer in the Catholic Hispanic community. He was here long before the recent blossoming growth in Baltimore. At 73, he was a wisdom figure, a counselor, a healer, a mentor and a friend - all on top of being a loving husband, father, grandfather, great-grandfather, godfather and uncle. Samuel

was a hard-working, honest, faith-filled man. Simply put, he was a good man.

I share this snippet because this simple immigrant man touched so many lives, helped so many people, planted seeds for solid families - and inspired me in my priesthood. It is so reassuring to know that being good has not gone out of style. Simply put, he was a good man.

Rest in peace, Samuel.

Father Robert Wojtek is pastor of Sacred Heart of Jesus/Sagrado Corazón de Jesús, Highlandtown.

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