

What might have been

One had to be deeply impressed by the farewell to Senator Ted Kennedy - impressed, as well, by his life and accomplishments.

In his personal life, his role as head of the extensive Kennedy clan the long years following the assassination of his two brothers could have been burdensome, but, rather, seemed to be a vocation, caring and inclusive to several generations of extended family, especially in times of adversity. Likewise, the respect and affection he won from members of his staff and Senate colleagues across the full ideological spectrum. To political foe and friend alike, he was said to be thoughtful and generous with a sensitivity and compassion that seemed to know no bounds.

He will go down in history for his legislative accomplishments: the advancement of immigrants, the poor, the elderly and yes, virtually all those mentioned by Jesus in Matthew 25. This seemed to emanate not singly, though surely, from a "liberal agenda," but from a genuine Christian conviction - if we are to believe those who knew him best - of the dignity of the human person made to God's image. He was unashamedly Catholic in his self-identity and heritage, a frequent attender of daily Mass. He even wrote a letter to Pope Benedict XVI last month, personally delivered by President Obama while in the Vatican. In the letter, excerpts of which were made public this past weekend, Sen. Kennedy writes, "I have been blessed to be part of a wonderful family and both of my parents, particularly my mother, kept our Catholic faith at the center of our lives."

Then there's the elephant right smack center in the room. Never mentioned in the eulogies during his funeral Mass (nor, probably should it have been brought up) and rarely alluded to in the millions of words of press commentary, Sen. Kennedy's decades-long support for abortion rights cannot be overlooked by the nation he served as we look back on his life as a public servant. Early in his career strongly and staunchly pro-life and anti-abortion, a mid-career reversal turned him into a pro-abortion poster boy, leading the ranks of so many Catholics in high-elective office in promoting a Planned Parenthood agenda, full chapter and verse.

This is not interpretation or attack, but fact. Sad fact, indeed, for so many, including

the countless lives impacted by the consequences of his political decisions on the issue of abortion.

And, it appears he may have been doing some soul-searching himself. “I know that I have been an imperfect human being, but with the help of my faith I have tried to right my path,” he continued in his June/July letter to the Pope. “I have always tried to be a faithful Catholic, Your Holiness, and though I have fallen short through human failings, I have never failed to believe and respect the fundamental teachings of my faith.”

What happened, what motivated him and seemingly justified his ability to reconcile his abortion stance with his Catholic Faith? How truly comfortable was he with this “reconciliation?” And how different would our culture and our country be today if this uniquely gifted leader extended his renowned witness to that of a consistent ethic of life? Now it is not for us to judge, but for Another. As members of Christ’s Body soon to face that same Judge, we must pray that Ted Kennedy be rewarded for the vast amount of good he accomplished, forgiven for his shortcomings and, if granted Paradise, that he intercede for an America even more just and inclusive than the one he hoped, worked and prayed for throughout his life and at his death.