

With help, a priest remembers his mother

By Paul McMullen

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Father Mark Bialek was embraced by Monsignor James W. Hannon, and then Monsignor Adam J. Parker.

"I may be an only child," he told them, "but I have lots of brothers."

That exchange occurred during a visitation at a Perry Hall funeral home for Father Bialek's mother, Sharon. She died May 20 at the University of Maryland Shock Trauma Center from injuries she had sustained two days earlier, when she was struck by a car after attending the confirmation Mass for a niece and nephew at St. Ursula Church in Parkville.

Mrs. Bialek's husband, Robert, was also injured in the May 18 accident.

Their son was the main celebrant at her funeral Mass May 25 at their home parish, Shrine of the Little Flower in Baltimore, where Father Bialek had the support of dozens of priests, from Archbishop William E. Lori, who presided along with Bishops Denis J. Madden and Mitchell T. Rozanski; to the Conventual Franciscans who staff Archbishop Curley High School, his prep alma mater, to Father Hector Mateus-Ariza, one of his best friends.

In remarks after the Eucharist, Father Bialek, the pastor of Resurrection of Our Lord in Laurel, referenced the example of his parents - "the reason I became a priest" - and that of his fellow clergy.

There was Father Stephen Hook, pastor of St. Ursula, who after the accident, Father Bialek said, "was on Putty Hill Road, anointing my parents and comforting me."

There was Bishop Rozanski, the homilist at the funeral. He spent part of Pentecost Sunday at Mrs. Bialek's bedside at Shock Trauma, and come Sunday May 26, Father Bialek said, he would "be at Resurrection doing one of the Masses, so I can be with my family."

There was Monsignor Kevin T. Schenning, pastor of St. Joseph in Fullerton, who called Father Bialek and said "Mark, we've got the (post-funeral) reception covered, we'll take care of it.' "

"Having you behind me," Father Bialek said, "made all the difference in the world and gave me the strength to get through today."

His upbeat nature was nurtured by his mother, who was 67 when an accident took the life that stage 4 cancer could not.

“Mom didn’t believe in a concept,” Father Bialek said. “Mom encountered a person, the risen Christ. Two years ago, when she got sick, she said ‘I’m glad it’s me. ... I can handle the cancer. No matter what, I’m going to be faithful.’ In all my years in the priesthood, I’ve never heard a better homily than that.”

Bishop Rozanski, meanwhile, referenced the playfulness of Mrs. Bialek, on display in photos at Disney World or posing in front of flamingos, mugging for the camera.

“At different times in her life,” Bishop Rozanski said, “Sharon said, ‘Growing old is not optional, but growing up is.’ She lived her life in a joyful way with childlike awe and wonder in her experiences of this earthy pilgrimage.”

In lieu of flowers, the family asked that donations be made to the St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital in Memphis or the Seminarian Fund for the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

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