

John Charles Moore
Funeral Homily
July 2, 2018

Bishop Parker, Bishop Madden, Monsignor Hannon, Monsignor Jaskot, Reverend Fathers, Brother Deacons, ladies and gentlemen – friends of Father John all.

On a cold and rainy night in February 1986 Msgr. Ed Echle brought a skinny, middle-aged priest to our door in Braddock Heights. He introduced Father John Moore to a small group of pilgrims gathered to establish a Mission parish in Middletown. After introductions Father Echle left John alone with us. You can only imagine how intimidating that must have been for John.

But then, Father John gave us our first of many lessons in faith. He simply opened the Scriptures and read from Paul's first letter to the people of Corinth. You know the passage: "There are different gifts but the same Spirit; there are different ministries but the same Lord." John closed the book, looked around the room, and then said "tonight you are called to exercise those gifts, those charisms, because each of you are living stones – empowered by your baptism to build His house – His kingdom in Middletown."

And so – the journey began.

John Charles Moore was born in Philadelphia in 1934. His identical twin, Jim, is with us tonight. Jim's daughter Valerie and her husband Mark, and their children, Erin and Brian, and Jim's son Matthew are here too. Matthew's wife Shannon and their children Ryan and Finnigan will join us at the burial in Philadelphia tomorrow. Jim, we welcome all of you to Holy Family and we offer our prayerful condolences. As you can see, your brother was deeply loved and we all mourn his passing.

John said that he was always felt a vocation to the priesthood – even in elementary school at Good Shepherd. But then he discovered his love of teaching at West Catholic high school with the Christian Brothers. He ultimately decided to enter the Brothers and so 10 days after his graduation, at age 17, Jim drove him away from home, to Annandale to become a Christian Brother.

John taught Religion and English in Pittsburg, Washington DC, and at Calvert Hall, served as class advisor, moderated the yearbook and school newspapers and worked in administration. One of his students from Pittsburg told Sue that John was a tough grader – "no one could get a perfect score from Brother Robert." he said, "He set the bar high and we rose to his expectations!" Deacon George put it this way: "He challenged us to be and do more than we thought we could do." That same philosophy continued throughout all of John's priesthood.

After 23 years as a Christian Brother, John heard the Lord's call to priestly ministry again. He met with then Msgr. Frank Murphy and asked to be ordained. Bishop Murphy became his lifelong friend. After John's ordination in 1978, he served as an associate pastor at St. Rose of Lima and Thomas Moore.

Eight years later, Frank Murphy asked him to consider a new challenge, and Ed Echle brought him to our doorstep.

And so we come to today. We gather to bid farewell to Father John Charles Moore and we acknowledge that he now rests in the arms of a loving Father. We celebrate his life, and we give thanks for all he has done for us.

John was a unique individual! He could be loving and infuriating at the same time. He was precise and meticulous in his approach to everything, he analyzed a project, kept careful notes, and critiqued his own work. For John, details were important and planning was all-important.

John even planned and scripted our celebration tonight. He left three pages of precise instructions for our celebration today – he chose the time, the readings, the pallbearers, lectors, music, cantors and musicians. He told us how he wanted to be placed in the casket, what he should be wearing, and even how to arrange the furniture!

In fact, the only thing he did not specify was the gospel passage – he left that for me to choose – so let me start there. I chose tonight's gospel because it speaks of the love of the Lord and the comfort he offers us upon death. But I think Thomas's plea is the most telling – a soulful cry that echoes through the ages; "Master, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?" How often have you and I repeated the same plea?

John Moore was able to show us the way. As pastor, he brought out the best in each of us. He would ask someone to develop a program or a ministry, he'd ask you to accept responsibility for a task, but he would always give you the authority to complete the job. Micromanagement was never part of John's lexicon!

I was speaking to Father Kevin after mass yesterday and he echoed this sentiment, but pointed out that part of this was John's unique ability to match the person with the ministry – as Kevin said, "he always seemed to pick the right person to do the job!" John invited each of us to accept new roles and responsibilities and when he needed help he simply said, "Go beat the bushes and ask someone who has been waiting to be asked."

John also showed us the importance of Scripture, just as he did in our living room so long ago. He opened every meeting with a reading from the Testament – and the reading was always carefully chosen to address the subject under consideration. He showed us how to pray with Scripture.

For John, learning was lifelong adventure. He taught us in his Scripture based and practical homilies, he used the bulletin to reprint articles from America and other resources, he encouraged bible study and Lenten programs, and he supported our parish library that he named in Cardinal Keeler's honor. In John's mind, learning led to belonging, belonging led to community, and community demanded action.

Now let me turn to John's selections. The reading from Sirach speaks of the importance of friendship in the life of the Christian. One of John's favorite Scripture passages was John's 15th

chapter. He quoted it often: “You are my friends if you do what I command you. I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends.”

John saw friendship as an important part of his ministry. Many of you have commented how John never forgot a birthday, anniversary, or holiday. He would always remember you with an appropriate card. For almost 20 years, Paula Duva addressed his Christmas Cards – some 300 in number. In fact, in the last several years John had to cut the list down – postage had become too expensive, but he resisted that because “he had to keep in touch” because friends were important.

But it was more than that, it was the interpersonal relationships that John developed and treasured. He walked in the malls for exercise and he got to know the shopkeepers and folks in the Kiosks on a personal level. He called this his “Mall Ministry” and he considered them his friends. He met people of other cultures and faiths and he was often the only Catholic priest, much less a Christian, that these folks had ever met. Later he did the same at Buckingham’s Choice and he called it the Ministry of the Hall.

He could also be very direct. George Sisson and I are deacons because of him. Last night George wrote me and said: “I would not be a deacon were it not for him. Resisting calls by you and Sue and a few others as the deadline for applying approached, John called me into his office and said plainly but firmly ‘George you need to do this.’ I completed the application the next day.” John was like that – you did what he asked!

John developed friendships with the ministers and Pastors here in Middletown and many of you are honoring him by your presence here tonight. Thank you for coming and we pray that the Ministerium that you have jointly developed will continue to flourish and support our congregations in the valley.

In Paul’s letter to the Philippians, he spoke about anxiety and the peace that Jesus Christ offers to each of us. I suspect John chose this passage because in his later years, the Lord’s peace sometimes eluded him.

One of the most endearing things about John Moore was his humanity and absolute honesty. He was brutally honest about himself and he often wrote about his health and the difficulties he was encountering – whether it was heart problems or anxiety attacks – sometimes it was more than we wanted to know especially when he discussed his intestinal problems!

In his final years, his anxiety became crippling. He had glaucoma and was terrified that he might go blind. He had high blood pressure and heart disease that required multiple stents. John became obsessive about these problems and his medications and he kept hourly lists to monitor his health. As his anxiety increased, he became increasingly dependent on the support of his friends and former parishioners. This compromised his quality of life, but he soldered on with your support.

When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, Lazarus staggered out of the grave still bound by his burial cloths and Jesus said: “unbind him and let him go free.” Tonight we celebrate the fact that

as he aged, John Moore sometimes staggered, but he is now unbound. He has been set free – free in the arms of a loving God.

It is now 32 years since that first meeting in our living room. It has been a wondrous and exciting journey, a journey filled with challenges, joys and successes and yes, some disappointments. But just look around you tonight! We gather in this magnificent church that Father Moore and this community built together

But more than that, tonight we understand that John’s legacy is not in these buildings – they are just bricks and stone; it in us – it is you and me. John’s legacy lies with the students he taught, the people he counseled and comforted, the faith he shared, the vocations he encouraged, and the people he loved.

In his address at the groundbreaking for this building, John said: “This is a unique community that believes in a collegial process; this is a dynamic community anointed by the Spirit; this is a community of generous hearts and hand.” What he didn’t say was that this was a community following his leadership – and it is this community of faith that is his living legacy.

John often closed his letters to us with the phrase, “May God who began this work in us, bring it to completion.” Now it is up to us!

Let me close with what finally brought me to tears over John’s death. I found this in his papers the other day. It is a list of the pros and cons of his move to Middletown. He obviously recorded it as he was considering Bishop Frank’s request he come to Middletown. On the positive side he listed things he wanted to accomplish. Some of them were: “establish a parish, develop community, celebrate magnificent liturgies, involve people, build a church, renew my own life, set a precedent for future pastors, enable others.” And on the negative and doubts side he listed: “leave Baltimore and my support systems (friends), my mother’s needs me, living alone, can I do this at my age, living in the country, loosing my accumulated roots, and fear of the unknown.”

At the very bottom he wrote:

“I choose to...,
I choose not to...”

John Moore ultimately chose to trust in the Lord and he made a leap of faith. He came to Middletown, and for that, we give thanks and praise.

“May God who began this work in us, bring it to completion.”

Amen