

Bishop Andrew J. McDonald

Vigil Service Homily

Monday, April 7, 2014

Before I begin, I would like to extend to Bishop McDonald's family, our deepest sympathy and prayers at this time. Please know that all of you are in our thoughts and prayers as we pray for the repose of his soul.

Bishop Taylor, bishops, priests, deacons, consecrated life and good people of the Diocese of Little Rock, I stand here tonight feeling a little unworthy to offer this homily to you. There are others who are more eloquent homilists than I and others who were closer to Bishop McDonald than I, but I can truly tell you that most and foremost, Bishop McDonald was my friend as he was your friend as each and every letter he signed indicated.

This night I chose two readings that are close to my heart but reveal much about what we and what Bishop McDonald believed about life and death. In the passage from Wisdom, we heard these words:

The souls of the just are in the hand of God, and no torment shall touch them. They seemed, in the view of the foolish, to be dead; and their passing away was thought an affliction and their going forth from us, utter destruction. But they are in peace.

Not only do these words offer us comfort when we lose someone in our lives ***{they are at peace}***, but tell us where we are - when our earthly body dies, ***{in the hands of God}***. My friends, Bishop McDonald is now in the hands of God. His earthly journey is over, but his life will go on for all eternity. We know this because we believe and profess this reality and because each of us remember the man whom we so fondly called Bishop McDonald, who as our shepherd reminded us all of our final destiny, our home with the Lord.

In the Gospel:

Jesus said to Thomas, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Bishop McDonald lived and believed this whole heartedly. He taught us this by his example and by the life he led. This we all know about our former bishop.

HE LOVED HIS FAMILY. All of us here and anyone who ever heard one of his homilies knew that not only did he give us 2 or 3 homilies every time he preached, we could expect to hear about his family, especially about his mother, Theresa. We know all the stories; the good times and hard times. He loved them so much that there was a desire in him that all of us would come to appreciate and love our own families as God's gift to us. This love was expressed in **his love** of our Blessed Mother. He desired that each of us have that same relationship with her as with our own mothers. Every time he spoke of his family about their love or vocation, we came to know Bishop McDonald a little bit more and to understand that Jesus is the way the truth and the life.

HE LOVED HIS CHURCH. Just read his obituary, it's a beautiful testimony of a life dedicated to service of God and his Church. Not only was it 65 years of priesthood and episcopacy, it was 65 years of life immersed in the living out of the Truth that Church is the bride of Christ. In his time here as our bishop, it's not only what he **did** for us, such as the *Cursillo* movement, Youth Ministry, the restoration of the permanent diaconate or all the diocesan boards he created, but at the core of all he did **was ALL OF US**. He understood that the church **is the people of God**. The reason for every one of his accomplishments **was us**, so **we** could understand more that Jesus was the way, the truth and the life.

HE LOVED HIS PRIESTS. Fathers, every homily, every letter, every word of advice, every suggestion, every meeting with us as a group or as individuals was done with Fatherly love and care and the concern of a true shepherd who cared for his flock. He loved his priesthood and wanted the same for us. When we listened to him and obeyed him, we understood more and more that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life

HE LOVED HIS FLOCK Bishop McDonald had this uncanny ability to know everyone's name. {except for **ONE**; at my father's diaconate ordination during the reception, the bishop greeted my father with congratulations and my mother who was not exactly next to him, he said, "Nice to meet you sister.....I do not know what was funnier, him not knowing she was my mother or mistaking her for a nun. ☺} I know it frustrated him so in later years when that ability seemed to slip away.

Knowing us personally by name was his way of expressing his love to us. And he loved all his flock; our African-American brothers and sisters, our Vietnamese brothers and sisters who arrived in the mid 70's, our Hispanic brothers and sisters who arrived in the late 80's, the prisoners on death row and especially the unborn which he defended with a passion. There was another group I know he loved so well.

Every Christmas while I was at St. Theresa the bishop would come to my rectory to see my Christmas display. Like me, he loved Christmas. But every year he brought families who had lost loved ones, especially children, during the holidays. It was a way for him to

offer them a little joy in their lives. He did this every year. He loved them so. His love for us was just another reminder that Jesus is the way the truth and the life.

My friends, Bishop McDonald is at peace. For him there is no more pain or suffering; his reward for a job well done. Bishop McDonald, I want to say something to you. Thank you. I will miss your letters, your kindness, your advice and even your articles on trains that you would send me. My Christmas' are not the same without your visits. So, from one Irishman to another I say to you:

***May the road rise up to meet you. May the wind be always at your back.
May the sun shine warm upon your face; the rains fall soft upon your fields
and until we meet again, may God hold you in the palm of His hand.***

From all of us I say: Thank you for the love, example and leadership you gave to us for so many years. We were truly blessed. Thank you for teaching each of us to come to know Jesus as the way the truth and the life. Thank you for inspiring us to live our faith and follow Jesus and only him. So, really, until we all meet again, know we are praying for you as we know you are praying for us.

Your friends ... The Presbyterate and the people of the Diocese of Little Rock.