

Dear Fellow Members of the Guild:

Just a few days ago, I attended the funeral mass of The Rt Rev'd Paul Moore Jr., XIII Bishop of my diocese. I had known Bishop Moore when I was previously in the diocese, and served here with his license. Bishop Moore had also been sponsored for ordination from my parish just after he came back from the War. It was natural that I should wish to attend, for even though I often disagreed with his conclusions or perhaps just with his methods, it was very clear that Bishop Moore was a sincere and committed Christian who always had the courage of his convictions.

Let me say from the beginning that I respect entirely his family's right to have the funeral they wished, and the Cathedral of St John the Divine's right to hold it as they saw fit. The interesting thing is that the effect it had on me, and on a few others I spoke with after, was one of sadness at his loss and joy at his extraordinary life. Nothing is wrong with these emotions, and I certainly would wish that they both be represented. What strikes me, though, is that they are not *central* to what we were about that day at St John the Divine. The most important thing should have been prayer for his soul to enter into the fullest presence of God through the saving power of Our Lord's Resurrection, and this, especially, at Eastertide. Even for a priest (and the Superior of the Guild of All Souls!), this was difficult to focus on. The service went back and forth with various competing strains competing for attention and while it would be hard to say exactly what effect it had on the thousands of worshippers present, I think it would be fairly safe to say that the dominant strain was one of concentrating on the person of Bishop Moore himself.

It has increasingly become the case that funerals do this. A Roman Catholic bishop in northern New Jersey recently issued directives to try to reduce this trend. They provided for no family members speaking at services, no eulogies, and no non-scriptural readings. This is a very good thing, in my view. We have far too much of this in our funeral services. The reason to oppose this trend is not that we do not cherish the memory of our departed, or wish their accomplishments to be forgotten. Far from it! The reason is that each of us goes to his Creator as a child of God. This was our gift in the Sacrament of Baptism, the great Easter Sacrament. We do not need to have lives of great achievement, perfect records, a youthful appearance, or as a well-known television character says, "a large house, swimming pool, sauna and room for a pony", to qualify to meet God. Our Faith and our Works in life are what He uses to judge us, but when we go to meet him, we go as children of God to their Loving Father. The earthly rank and status of the dead is now meaningless, and this is symbolised by the fact that the black pall is cast over the coffin which, however grand, is now hidden away. The prayers that the Church says for the dead, and which the Guild has been praying these many years, take nothing into account beyond the fact that the dead have been baptised into Christ's Resurrection. Nothing else matters or is germane.

We are occasionally asked why we pray constantly for people whom we have never known, and who, in many cases, died long before we were born. The simple answer is that the bonds of love between us are based on the twin facts of our common humanity and our common baptisms. If we have all been baptised, we are all children of God, and

therefore brothers and sisters ourselves. One day, some other priest will write this letter or something like it, and the Intercession Paper will carry our names. When that time comes, we shall know that even if our accomplishments, our own ministries, our lives and the way we lived them be forgotten, one fact will not have been forgotten: the fact that we lived and died as children of God, heirs of everlasting life! What we pray for, as a Guild together, is that each of these children be called by the Father to take up this birthright in the everlasting life made possible of Our Lord Jesus Christ's Passion, Death and Resurrection!

Yours in the Holy Souls,

Father Barry Swain