

## Homily

### Mass of Christian Burial for Richard D Appicci, O.S.A.

February 5, 2007

By John E. Deegan, O.S.A.

On behalf of all of my Augustinian brothers and the many friends gathered here, I want to express to you, Bea, and to all of your family, our heartfelt sorrow at the loss of your brother and ours, Fr. Dick Appicci.

Bea, how proud you must be of Dick. He was truly a "Man for All Seasons and Ministries." His long career as an Augustinian friar recounts his showing the face of Jesus as a teacher, administrator, missionary, prison chaplain and, most importantly, as a friend.

I know that Dick was called Richie by his parents and family but I'm a little more comfortable with Dick. Bea tells me that Dick got his openness to all peoples from his Father and his mischievous spirit from his Mother Ida. Dick enjoyed political conversations with Bea and her husband Fred, generally accompanied by martinis, the glass and the booze properly chilled before hand.

Dick delighted in the company of his nephew Robert and his nieces Linda and Carol. Linda remembers that, at Easter time, Dick would hide silver dollars in the back yard for the kids to find. Weeks later the children would still be finding coins in hidden places forgotten by Dick.

In more recent years, Dick had formed a special relationship with his grandnephews, Robert and Paul, and they will testify as to the great influence Dick has been on their lives.

At a time like this, memories come flooding in and I remember early on in the seminary friars telling of how their life's journey brought them to the Augustinians. Some told of an exciting spiritual journey ending in a call by the Spirit. When it came to Dick's turn to tell his story, he simply said that he got a book listing the names and histories of the various religious orders of men and the Augustinians were the first in alphabetical order.

On top of that, they were close by North Bergen in Staten Island. Dick said that he didn't regret his choice because when he went to the High School/House of Postulants everybody seemed to know his name. The students would come up to him and say "Are you a PG." It wasn't until later when he realized that they weren't saying "Appicci" but asking if he were a PG...a Post Graduate.

Someone writing a tribute to Dick after his death wrote: "He bubbled over with mirth and mischief." And that was certainly true.

I want to read to you a quote which I believe Dick would applaud and which sums up his faith in action, his walking with Jesus:

“.....I have the audacity to believe that people everywhere can have three meals a day for their bodies, education and culture for their minds, and dignity, equality, and freedom for their spirits. I believe that what self-centered people have torn down other-centered people can build up and that one day humanity will bow before the altars of God and be Crowned triumphant over war and bloodshed, and non-violent redemptive good will be Proclaimed the rule of the land. And I still believe that We shall overcome.”

That quote, of course, is from Dr. Martin Luther King in 1964.

As some of you know, Dick in his capacity as Vice President for Student Affairs was instrumental in bringing Dr. King to campus in 1965, but not without some controversy.

King was against the Vietnam War and was accused of Communist sympathies.

Dick, ever the visionary and prophet, petitioned the powers that be to offer to the Rev. King an Honorary degree from the University.

Later Dick told me that he had to settle for offering Dr. King a perpetual membership in the Augustinian Seminary Guild. Hindsight is great!

When we reflect on the King quote, it is exactly what Dick worked for his whole life: needy people who struggled for “three meals a day for their bodies, education and culture for their minds, dignity, equality and freedom for their spirits.”

Bishop Turley, Dick’s dear friend from Chuluchanas, Peru, said of Dick: “He hopes against hope, finding hope where there is nothing to be hoped for. He was real – he cast his lot with the people he served.”

The readings Dick chose for this Eucharist celebrating his passing from life to life, truly reflect what he believed and who he was.

From Romans we read; “If God is for us who can be against us....”

Dick, through his 20 years of ministry to the people of Peru, came to understand firsthand what anguish, distress poverty, hunger and abandonment can do to the human spirit and body. In recent years he would return from his visits to the missions in Peru shaken by what he saw as the vicious cycle of poverty which gripped the people and the government.

And yet, he was strengthened and refreshed by the love of the people for him and for the gospel of love which he preached.

Dick learned to believe that: “...in all things we conquer overwhelmingly through Him who loves us.”

It is this love of God in Christ that fueled Dick's ministry to the thousands and perhaps, unknown thousands whom he touched on his journey back to God.

As I reflected on Matthew's gospel passage which Dick chose, I thought how fitting. Not only did Dick identify with "those that mourn, the poor in spirit, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for justice, the merciful and the peace makers, but he himself was the personification of all of these virtues. Most of us here, and many others, can give testimony that through the ministry of Dick Appicci, our spirits have been lifted, our sorrow eased, and our resolve strengthened.

He has pushed us, ever so gently, but firmly, to work and preach for justice in a world that seems to be spinning out of control fueled by deceit, vengeance, violence and war. Above all, by his life and ministry, Dick has taught us to be merciful, non-judgmental and seekers of reconciliation.

Dick always had a soft spot in his heart for children and young people. He had so many godchildren, I could never keep track of them all. But he did! And through his begging, cajoling and, I might say, slight of hand, was able to help them all. Dick's list of special projects was endless and many of you, to your credit, were made part of this conspiracy to do good.

Dick was a peacemaker and when we began our outreach to former Augustinians, our O.S.A. Alumni, as it were, Dick was the one to head it up.

He was inclusive in his ministry and, if truth be told, Canon Law and Liturgical rubrics were not his forte.

But PEOPLE were. And people who came into his presence knew that they were important to him and that their dignity as a creation of God would always be respected.

About 10 days ago, as I was visiting with Dick, he looked at me with those penetrating eyes and said: "You better get your homily ready." I said: "So you think God is at the door?" And he said: "Yes." I asked him what he would like me to say. He answered, "Oh, I don't know." Then he paused a moment and thought. Then he said: "Don't forget to tell them that I was a prison chaplain for 12 years."

Dick really loved his time ministering to the prisoners at Graterford and SCI-Chester. He told me that they were real people. Sure, they had made mistakes but they were trying to put behind them lives of bad judgments and deceptions and learn to love and let themselves be loved in Jesus.

Joe Genito and our music ministers are going to sing a song that Dick requested entitled: "I want Jesus to Walk with Me." Joe tells me that it has become somewhat of an anthem for the prisoners and, thus, close to Dick's heart. The words of the song are these:

I WANT JESUS TO WALK WITH ME.  
I WANT JESUS TO WALK WITH ME.  
ALL ALONG MY PILGRIM JOURNEY, LORD,  
I WANT JESUS TO WALK WITH ME.

IN MY TRIALS, LORD, WALK WITH ME.  
IN MY TRIALS, LORD, WALK WITH ME.

WHEN MY HEART IS ALMOST BREAKING, LORD,  
I WANT JESUS TO WALK WITH ME.

WHEN I'M IN TROUBLE, LORD, WALK WITH ME.  
WHEN I'M IN TROUBLE, LORD, WALK WITH ME.  
WHEN MY HEAD IS BOWED IN SORROW, LORD,  
I WANT JESUS TO WALK WITH ME.

In our life times, Dick Appicci showed us the face of Jesus and walked with us.

In our JOYS, he walked with us.

In our TRIALS AND TROUBLES, he walked with us.

When our hearts were ALMOST BREAKING, he walked with us.

And now, when our heads are bowed in SORROW at the loss of our friend, Dick Appicci, we  
pray: LORD WE WANT JESUS TO WALK WITH HIM!