

Homily for Father Mario Marzocchi, SSS

I admit that it's a bit difficult for me to give this homily. I have known Mario since 1954, when he entered Eymard college, (although we called him Tommy then.) We became close friends, (along with Deacon Joe), and though not often stationed together, that friendship endured. Perhaps that is the reason I took the less-than-serious choice of the reading from Second Maccabees. It speaks of Judas Maccabeus taking up a collection as an offering for the temple of Jerusalem. It says that every man was expected to contribute.

If there is one thing that Mario knew how to do, it was to collect money. He built the parish life center here (at Saint Paschal Baylon parish), raising a million dollars to do so. Before he left San Antonio, he raised another two million to build a much-needed parish life center there as well. He just needed to put out his hand, smile a bit, and the money soon filled it.

Seriously, this not only shows that he took his responsibilities as a parish administrator seriously, he took his life as a religious and as a priest seriously as well. As we read in 2 Timothy, he "stirred into flame the gift of God" that he had received. It was that same zeal and commitment that led him to become catechetical director of the archdiocese of New York—and that led him to listen to the prompting of many that he consider becoming a priest. He did consider, and did become a priest, and was asked to be pastor in five of our parishes. Each of them thrived under his leadership, his care, and concern. He was never ashamed of his "testimony to our Lord" and relied on the "strength that comes from God" throughout his years as a religious and as a priest.

He was not simply a priest, but a priest of the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament. He had a deep love for the Mass and stressed adoration of the Eucharist. In a time in the Church when confessions are few and far between, his church in San Antonio had people lined up day after day to confess their sins. Bishop Gustavo was so impressed that he told his priests that if Mario (who was alone at that time) could hear confessions every day, they should be able to do the same. Again, as 2 Timothy says, "He called us to a holy life... according to the grace bestowed on us in Christ Jesus."

He was always noted for his outgoing friendship. This extended to all those he met, and also to those who would visit him in his various parishes. In San Antonio, the Riverwalk is about five minutes from our parish. Mario would often walk there. One can't blame him; it was 10 or 12 feet below street level, and it was a lot cooler there. The point is that when he would take anyone there, it seemed like everybody there knew him. If he stopped to get you ice cream, he would usually get away without paying due to the generosity of others.

In a heartfelt testimony, one priest in San Antonio wrote: "Fr. Mario so appreciated us priests who were privileged to assist him at St. Joseph's Church. He not only paid us a premier stipend for helping out, but every year honored us with a 5-Star dinner at the rectory. Parishioners who loved and respected him provided the dining. 'Respect' is what you have to have before you can get it. Fr. Mario respected each of us who helped out and so we respected him tremendously as well. He could not have been a better priest. Humble and totally self-giving—it was a most special gift to be silently inspired by him! He brought out the best in us." What a wonderful tribute!

Mario had two great loves in his life: the Eucharist and our Blessed Mother. His love of Mary is what caused him to choose the name Mario when he entered religious life—a name kept for the rest of his life. He had a special devotion to our Lady of Guadalupe and traveled many times to her shrine in Mexico City, leading pilgrimages there each year. In fact, the parish life center he built in San Antonio is dedicated to Mary as “Mother of the Americas,” emphasizing that when Mary appeared in what is now Mexico in 1531, we all formed one undivided continent.

I’ve already mentioned his love of the Eucharist. He took to heart our beautiful reading from Saint John: “I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world. Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you... For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him.”

The Eucharist and the Mass were truly the source of his life. If there were enough priests wherever he was pastor, he cheerfully added an extra Mass or two. His love for the Eucharist was real, and people could sense this in him. His reverence and demeanor when celebrating was sufficient to draw many to this sacrament.

It isn’t given to everyone to know when one is going to die... Mario, however, was well aware that his time was up. When the doctors discovered that his cancer had metastasized throughout his body, he refused any radiation or chemotherapy. He did not need to live another few months. He chose instead to ask for hospice care and wait for the Lord he had spent years adoring to call him home. Ten days later he left us for his Lord and Savior.

Father John Keenan and I visited him the day he died. It was obvious seeing him that he was soon to leave this world, so I began the prayers for the dying. There is a section there that I find particularly beautiful: “Go forth, Christian soul, from this world in the name of God the almighty Father, who created you, in the name of Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, who suffered for you, in the name of the Holy Spirit, who was poured out upon you, go forth, faithful Christian. May you live in peace this day, may your home be with God in Zion, with Mary, the virgin Mother of God, with Joseph, and all the angels and saints.” He died three hours later.

And now this man, this priest, meets the reality of what he has always lived, as the grace of the resurrection, so abundant in his life, now becomes his reality and his reward in death. What he has lived, what Christ has given us through him, he now fully becomes.

May Christ, the living bread, who gave his life for the world, raise his body up on the last day. Today we are gathered here to honor a man, one who never failed to call *us* to be saints. We have lost a brother and a friend. We have lost a confessor, a spiritual director, and a preacher. But we have gained an advocate for us at the throne of grace. And we should never forget the example of commitment he left for us.

Mario, you will be missed.

Funeral Homily for Fr Mario Marzocchi, SSS
By Fr. Paul Bernier, SSS
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Saint Paschal Baylon Parish, Ohio