

Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year B  
January 31, 2021  
First Mass at Saint Cecilia

*“I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their kin, and will put my words into his mouth; he will tell them all that I command him.”*

*In the Name of the Father, + and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Dear Friends,

I would first like to say ‘thank you’ for the incredibly warm welcome. As I have said many times, this is coming a home for me. My memories of this Parish are some of the best in my educational and professional life. It is good to be back. God bless you and thank you.

As many of you are aware, I did serve here at Saint Cecilia as (we call it Parochial Vicar, but most commonly call it ‘Associate Pastor’) between the Summer of 2014 and the Summer of 2016. Back then, Fr. Mario had a good practice in place that only one Priest would preach the weekend. If it was your turn to preach, you would celebrate two (2) Masses and then attend, or concelebrate, the other. Regardless of who celebrated the Mass, Fr. Mario would usually turn up toward the end of Mass to assist with the distribution of Holy Communion and, of course...to deliver his announcements.

We worked well together, especially at the Altar. And it was the October of (I think) 2015 that I had Mass the week before our mandatory Diocesan Retreat in Southern Indiana. He came, as was his custom, for the announcements and explained that we would both be away during the week that followed. When announcements were done, I took advantage of the opportunity to ask for prayers and to remind the congregation that, even though the Fathers were away, to keep the partying to a minimum, and to keep the place tidy.

Father Mario, still the Ambo, suddenly interrupted me to remind everyone that I would have to leave early to be with my Brother Priests and the Bishop, because I was still a member of the Junior Clergy (those ordained 7 years or younger).

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I recall Fr. Mario taking great delight in everyone's snickers and jeers that the young pup had to be away for even longer. Meanwhile, he could rest comfortably for an extra day or two in Northern Kentucky. Admittedly, it was a good laugh.

Of course, he didn't think about the fact that my microphone was still on...and he was quite surprised when I mustered all the contempt I could in my voice to say, "Your presence will be missed." He almost fell to the floor laughing...as did the rest of the congregation.

It was all good fun. Good fun between two Brother Priests, working for the same mission, at the same home. I remember that story now because his presence is truly missed. He was unique; a loving man, a great Priest, a formidable Pastor, an endearing friend to so many, a great champion for the Church.

My friends, we have all lost so much this past year; we have lost friends and family members, we've lost social norms that helped us feel grounded and that we have a place, and many have lost the stability of their professional careers. We all, in our own way, feel the heartache and exhaustion of these many long months. And it hurts. For my part, I have lost 2 grandfathers and a classmate of our diocese, who was only a year older than me. And we all lost Father Mario. I cannot imagine the disappointment and suffering that you experienced in losing your Spiritual Father. So, I say to all of you, especially the Tizziani Family, that I am very sorry. You have my condolences and sympathy. It was all too fast, too much, and too soon.

In the mist of so much pain, fear and uncertainty from this past year, I am reminded and comforted of by a moment of grace that accompanied another incident, which involved the death of a young Priest in the Kansas City-Saint Joseph Diocese in Missouri, exactly one year ago. Fr. Even Harkins was a friend of many of my classmates. And at the age of 34, he took his own life in what still remains very mysterious circumstances. As you can imagine, his passing reduced

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everyone he knew to silence. It's a common experience; after all, 'what can be said?' (In moments like this.)

But, in one of his homilies, Fr. Harkins wrote, "Satan makes people unsure of who they are. Chaos and confusion are where the Devil thrives. He will try to provide the quick and easy answers, the paths of least resistance, all the while slowly entrapping us until the darkness of night is completely devoid of stars."

He knew in his way, as we do now, that the terrible consequence of tragedy is that it can make us feel very confused and isolated; we can be reduced to the silence. That silence has been deafening several times this year; it was a month ago, and it certainly was a year ago. And then a mutual friend said the only thing that made any sense at all: "I'm going to the Church to light and candle and pray."

My Friends, we cannot do this alone. We cannot succeed alone. We cannot allow ourselves to suffer alone. In the wake of so much hardship and pain, even prayer can seem to be of little help, but we must have surety in our heart of hearts that it is absolutely the most powerful thing that we can do. Prayer is the language of Faith, and the means of our relationship with God. And God is love.

We need God. We need Him to be our foundation, our strength, our everything, because, quite simply, only He can be. In the midst of so much change, we need the only one Who never changes, AND Who is the cause of every good we could ever know. We will labor in vain if God is not the center of our being; if our hearts are not one with His. For only God can build our families. Only God can build our Church. Only God can fill us with the grace necessary to navigate the dangers of this world and, even still, provide us with the virtues necessary to be good while doing so. Only God can give meaning to our suffering, expression to our pain, and

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reason for loving still. Only God can instill in us the Joy of knowing that life, having been gifted, has a purpose that endures...even beyond death.

Father Mario is missed. And we will not forget. Our prayer will continue to be for the repose of his soul and the souls of all the faithfully departed. Our work will continue to be for the greatness of this Parish Family, for the glory of God and the salvation of His people; those who now live and those yet to be born.

We give glory to God and honor to the dead by living...truly living for God.

I now come back to this Parish Family not to replace Fr. Mario, because that is impossible. No one can replace another person. Fr. Mario is unique and irreplaceable. But I have been asked to come here to continue the work of the office he devoted almost his entire Priestly life fulfilling: the Office of your Pastor.

I am here for you. I am here to serve God by teaching you the Gospel, by leading you in the ways of justice, peace and Truth, and by assisting you on your path to Holiness. That is my purpose. To that end, I have nothing to offer you but everything I am, and everything I will ever be.

But I cannot do this alone. I need the grace of God, and I need your help. No one can succeed alone. I need your help in continuing Our Lord's work. I need your help to make His Kingdom visible. I need your help, and especially your prayers, to be the good Priest I am called to be...for you.

Ours is one family, united in Jesus Christ. Only together, united in His love, can His mission endure in our Parish and in our world.

My prayer then is that by the Immaculate Heart of Mary, the Mother of the Church, we will be protected from all evil. May our Patroness, Saint Cecilia, and all the Angels and Saints,

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guide our every effort. And, by the grace of God, may the work that our Lord has begun in all of us be brought to fruition.

God love you.

*In the Name of the Father, + and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*