

FUNERAL OF JOHN TYDINGS (Nov. 21, 2013)

Your eminences Cardinals McCarrick and Wuerl, Donna, Mike, and Lynnly, and all of you other relatives and friends of John Tydings who have gathered here this morning: Most of us have surely read the article about John that appeared in the *Washington Post* two days ago, an article that highlighted some of the ways in which he helped transform this entire metropolitan region. Some of you may also remember an article about him that appeared almost exactly sixteen years ago, when he was concluding a three-month sabbatical that had allowed him not only to ponder changes in the way he worked but also to make two religious retreats in order to look more deeply into that part of his life. It is this latter aspect of John's life that should actually be emphasized this morning, because in the final analysis this is what mattered most to him. As one of his friends said at the time of John's retirement from the Greater Washington Board of Trade in 2001, "He is just a great man, with a human kindness and a human touch that touched all people. When you think of John, you're thinking of an icon."

It was surely significant that his friend used that word "icon," with all of its spiritual or religious connotations. I've seen this side of him ever since we first met in the fall of 1980, when he asked if I and another monk of my monastery, St. Anselm's Abbey, would meet regularly with him and his family throughout the fall, winter, and spring in order to prepare all of them for membership in the Catholic Church. This took place in a joyful ceremony at St. John the Baptist Church in Silver Spring in late June, 1981, after which I received some wonderful thank-you notes from the entire family. His daughter Lynnly's card ended with the words: "I am glad that we all became more than friends. Let's keep in touch, okay!" Little did I know at the

time how true that would become, and how John and Donna, Mike and Lynnly would adopt me as a kind of honorary member of their family.

Throughout all of the following years, I have followed their growth in the faith, which includes in a very special way the conviction that we have been created for more than this life alone. It therefore did not surprise me at all, when I was on the verge of asking the family what readings they would like for this funeral Mass, that Lynnly sent me a message saying that her father had already chosen the readings he wanted for his funeral. Here, in other words, was a man who did not shrink from the thought of death, did not use all sorts of contemporary euphemisms for those earthy, one-syllabic words of Germanic origin: “die” and “death.” John knew well how to live the virtue of hope, so evident in the words he chose from Jeremiah in our first reading: “I know well the plans I have in mind for you—oracle of the Lord—plans for your welfare and not your woe, so as to give you a future of hope.” The very same point was made in our second reading, from St. Paul’s letter to Titus, which ended with the Apostle assuring us that God saved us through the bath of rebirth and renewal by the holy Spirit so that we might “become heirs in hope of eternal life.” This is also what we will be hearing in a few minutes in the Preface of the Eucharistic Prayer, with the words: “For your faithful, Lord, life is changed, not ended, and when this earthly dwelling turns to dust, an eternal dwelling is made ready for them in heaven.”

If the readings from Jeremiah and the letter to Titus focus especially on the virtue of hope, what John chose for today’s Gospel reading deals with the virtue that is even more central in Jesus’ teaching, love. There, in his Last Supper discourse, Jesus has just washed his disciples’ feet and then explains the significance of that act in these words: “If I, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another’s feet. I have given you a model to

follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do.” John Tydings certainly took these words to heart. He was the senior vice-president of HEROES, a wonderful foundation dedicated to helping the families of law-enforcement officers and fire fighters who died in the line of duty. He was also very active in the Order of Malta, traveling to Lourdes with sick persons on pilgrimage to that holy site and, once there, helping them get around by pushing their wheelchairs to the church and grotto and assisting in other ways. So, too, he twice went to New Orleans after hurricane Katrina, literally using hammer and nails to help repair damaged homes in the Lower Ninth Ward. In short, this was a man who took seriously those words of Jesus in the Gospel: “I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do.” All of us may at times feel overwhelmed by so many needs that surround us, not only in this metropolitan area but in other parts of our country and world. The terrible temptation is to do nothing because one cannot do it all. The only true response, of course, is to do what one can. For that reason, the man who called John an icon was correct, for in seeing the way he served others, we can definitely be inspired to be more loving and caring ourselves.

Although we are called to show such love toward all persons—after all, Jesus tells us to love even our enemies and to do good to those who persecute us—there is nevertheless a rightful hierarchy in our love. It would be psychologically impossible for any of us to be as concerned for a starving person halfway around the world whom we have never met as for those with whom we live and work on a daily basis. As St. Paul writes in another of his letters, we should first of all learn to perform our religious duties to our own family, for, in Paul’s words, “Whoever does not provide for relatives and especially family members has denied the faith” (1 Tim 5:8). Here, too, John was an icon for us: faithfully married to his beloved wife Donna for fifty years, fully dedicated to the spiritual, moral, and physical well-being of their two children, Mike and Lynnly

(and rightly proud of how they in turn became loving parents of their own children), and so devoted to his grandchildren that on the same page on which he listed the readings for his funeral John also specified that the grandkids should do the readings and proclaim the petitions of the Prayer of the Faithful. In a time when family life is so threatened by various currents in our society, when some children have to grow up not even knowing who their father is, John is again a model and icon for all of us.

None of this, of course, is to say that he—like any of us—was without faults. A funeral Mass rightly includes prayers that the Lord forgive whatever sins and failings the deceased person committed in the course of his or her life. Indeed, such prayer is among the most precious things we can do here this morning. About a year ago I was at a meeting in Rome, and even though I have fond memories of various famous sites that I saw, one of the greatest and most memorable privileges was that of praying at the tomb of St. Monica, the mother of St. Augustine. In one part of his *Confessions*, Augustine recounts the final days of his mother on earth. As she lay very ill in the Italian city of Ostia, her other son said that he hoped she would not die so far from home but rather in her native North Africa, at which Monica turned to Augustine and said: “What silly talk! Lay this body anywhere, and take no trouble over it. One thing only do I ask of you, that you remember me at the altar of the Lord wherever you may be.” After his mother’s death, Augustine did more than fulfill her wish that he and his brother remember her at the altar, for he concludes the ninth book of his *Confessions* with these beautiful words: “Inspire others, my Lord, my God,... that as many [of your servants] as read this may remember Monica, your servant, at your altar, along with Patricius, her husband.... Let them remember with loving devotion these two who were my parents in this transitory light, but also were my brethren under you, our Father, within our mother the Catholic Church,... So may the

last request [my mother] made of me be granted to her more abundantly by the prayers of many ... than by my prayers alone.”

The many of us gathered here now have the opportunity of doing for John what Augustine once asked for Monica. We will do this throughout this service and, I trust, throughout the coming days and weeks, but first of all in a special way in the Prayer of the Faithful, to which we now turn. So let us all stand as I invite Amelia Grace and Reece to come to the lectern and read the petitions.