

FUNERAL OF FR. PATRICK GRANFIELD  
April 30, 2014

Some of you gathered here this morning were colleagues of Fr. Patrick for many years at Catholic University and have read books and articles that he wrote, perhaps including his very first article, a short piece about a saintly Benedictine monk of nineteenth-century Italy, Blessed Placid Riccardi. I think that the example given by that *beatus*--especially his deep prayer life joined with a fervent pastoral commitment--helped serve as a model for Patrick during the following sixty years of his own life.

That pastoral commitment was, of course, exercised primarily through his work as a theologian--not just as the author of articles and books or as a classroom lecturer, but also as someone devoted to his students, meticulously helping them craft their master's theses and doctoral dissertations in the best way possible. I well recall that last spring, shortly before the annual alumni days at Theological College, I got an email from a former student who was coming to the reunion from Europe and who asked in particular if I could arrange for him to meet Fr. Patrick, who had meant so much to him during his student days here in Washington. Many other former students surely had a similar, lasting gratitude for this gentle, thoughtful man. I dare say that the distinguished awards he had received from the Catholic Theological Society of America and from Catholic University did not mean as much to him as the knowledge that he had played such a major role in helping form future priests and scholars.

Our first reading, from the Book of Wisdom, speaks of the righteous as persons who had undergone one or another kind of trial or chastisement, but (it goes on to say) "they shall be greatly blessed, because God tried them and found them worthy of himself. As gold in the furnace he proved them, and as sacrificial offerings he took them to himself" (Wis 3:5-6). Similarly, our second reading, from St. Paul's Letter to the Romans, speaks of "the sufferings of the present time," but it, too, assures us that "they are as nothing compared with the glory to be

revealed to us" (Rom 8:18). By referring to such passages, I don't mean to imply that Fr. Patrick's life was one of excruciating or constant suffering, but there is no doubt that he did experience something of that, perhaps more than most of us. I was only a young monk in simple vows when, at a visitation about forty-five years ago, he and brother David were told by the monk who was then abbot president of our congregation that they should live outside the monastery for a period of time. I never really understood what was behind this, but I do know that it took them both by surprise. Fr. Patrick was then the junior master of Br. Peter and myself, and I remember his calling us to his room and saying how much he and his brother had been taken aback by this directive.

Similarly, I do not know all the reasons that led the two brothers eventually to request special permission from the Vatican to remain living outside, even though they continued to be listed as members of our community in the official roster. Of the few papers by Fr. Patrick that I have come across in recent days, one was a rather telling summary, in his own handwriting, of his conversation with a later abbot president, who said to him about ten years ago, "Your departure from the abbey was not your fault." I sense that Patrick wrote those words down verbatim because they meant a lot to him and, I hope, did something to relieve whatever he may have felt of what the Book of Wisdom calls chastisement.

There is also no doubt that he suffered greatly, both physically and emotionally, after the automobile accident that eventually led to the death of his brother David in 2010 and that brought significant physical pain to Patrick himself, as did an illness that required major surgery a couple years later. Beyond those trials, living alone, without his brother, over the past four years may have been the hardest blow of all--even though Patrick knew that he would have been most welcome to return to live here in the monastery at any time.

The Church rightly says that the homily at a funeral should not be a eulogy, so those who may want to learn more about Fr. Patrick's many scholarly accomplishments could read the bibliographical and biographical essays that his brother David and their mutual friend Peter Phan wrote about him in a Festschrift that was edited by Peter fourteen years ago. In closing this homily, I would simply like to quote a single sentence from Patrick's excellent book *The Limits of the Papacy*, a sentence that Peter rightly singles out as best capturing Patrick's feelings about the Church and his responsibility in writing about it. Patrick said: "What is important is that all members of the Church be open to Christ, who through his Spirit '... adorns it with his fruits and leads it to all truth and to perfect union in communion and ministry.'"<sup>1</sup> What I find most striking about that sentence is that this superb ecclesiologist, the Reverend Professor Patrick Granfield, well understood that ultimately the Church is not about itself but about Christ, and that only by being open to Christ can one be a faithful member of the Church. That kind of openness is what we saw in the good thief in this morning's Gospel, in his words: "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom," along with the gracious reply, "Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise" (Lk 23:42-43). We pray that Patrick has received a similarly gracious promise from the Lord whom he faithfully served for so many decades, and that his own openness to Christ may be an example for all of us.

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick Granfield, quoted by Peter Phan, "Patrick Granfield: A Biographical Essay," in *The Gift of the Church: A Textbook on Ecclesiology in Honor of Patrick Granfield, O.S.B.*, ed. Peter Phan (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 467. The final part of that sentence is a quotation from Vatican II's *Lumen Gentium*, no. 4.