

Remarks at Komechak Obsequies

08 14 2015

Trinity Church, Fort Worth

Good morning. My name is Bruce Coggin. I am a priest retired, and when I'm not working somewhere else I hang out here at Trinity, and George and his family have truly moved my heart by asking me to "say a few words" at his farewell. We've already heard two heartfelt and intimate reflections from two grandsons, and since everybody's heart is full of George right now, I imagine we could sit on the ground and tell tales for the rest of the day. I look over at Marilyn—you look so beautiful and George is so proud of you—and I wonder what's going through her mind. You know, Marilyn deals with life with a pen, and I wonder if one day we might not read her thoughts as all this comes upon her. As you know, the range of her inquiry is broad and profound. Thank you and George for inviting me. The rest of you, pray for me, because I have a lot to say in very little time. I've got three things.

First, I want to say as I have said to George's face and to others in his company, George Komechak was a hero of mine. Our association in the Church goes back about forty years, clear back to the old Diocese of Dallas where he was already active. When our Fort Worth diocese started to clabber a couple, three decades or so ago, George was one of the most vocal in saying, "I'm an Episcopalian, I mean to stay an Episcopalian, and I mean to die an Episcopalian." Back when a bunch tried to make off with Holy Apostles Church and the bishop stood mildly by, George put together a team and went after it—and got it back. When the schism was imminent, George hooked up with Via Media, kept his head, and maintained communication with the wider church as things went down the drain around him. When the schism came and we formed the Steering Committee, George was with us. And once the diocese was reorganized, he took on its most . . . vigorous . . . committee, Constitution and Canons, which he ran with a velvet hand right up to the last. Doesn't matter, wherever you go in this diocese you find George's fingerprints, and I am grateful to him for his courage and his persistence. We are here to bury a real hero, and don't you forget it.

Second, I want to say something about the circumstances of George's death. If you were in church last Sunday, you heard the poignant story of David weeping for his son Absalom, dead in battle. "Absalom, Absalom! My son, my son, oh Absalom! Would that I had died instead of you!" Heartbreaking and final. Well. Life brings us all Absalom, Absalom! moments, I reckon, sure does to

me and I expect it does to you. Moments when our courage collapses and we can't see our way forward. We all have them, and most of the time we stumble on and eventually find our way. But at other times, some people just decide to put an end to it, and . . . they do. When we hear of it we recoil in shock, and the word that keeps coming to our lips is NO. NO. NO. But . . . yes. At times some Christians have had some pretty ugly reactions to people who decide to end it. Some of you know I'm an English teacher, and I can remember stopping year after year to explain that moment in Hamlet when at Ophelia's funeral—she threw herself into a lake and her heavy gown bore her down to her death—when her brother Laertes leaps into the grave and rebukes the priest for so short a rite. The priest spits back, "It's more than she deserved." Great God, I can hardly think of an uglier response. Such a response means that one unhappy act at the end of a life can cancel out—well, in George's case, *decades* of faith and trust and loyalty and kindness and service and on and on and on, such a good and productive, wholesome life. All that is canceled by one unhappy act? You know, I think God's at least as smart as I am, and if that doesn't make sense to me, I don't think it makes sense to God either. Beside that, nobody is guilty of something he didn't intend, and George did not intend to separate himself from the love of God. He chose the readings for today some years ago, and he chose Romans 8. Whatever was in his mind, he didn't mean to cut himself off from God. I could easily imagine his last words were, "Father, into thy hands" And finally I think that kind of theology is blasphemous because it dares say the Holy Spirit can do no more for George. The Spirit blows where it wills, and my bet is that the Spirit and George have been pretty intensely involved in straightening George out on a couple of things and getting him healed and shaped up and back on track with a reordered understanding and with faith strengthened and renewed. That's what I think.

Finally, if I had to sum George up in a word or a phrase, I know what I'd choose. Don't know about you but I grew up in a little town where we all read obituaries in the paper every week, and when the deceased were men, the obit always included the phrase, "a fi-i-ine Chri-histian gennlemun." They were all fine Christian gentlemen, every one of them, although you knew most of them weren't worth skinning. But they were fine . . . and so on. Well now. Today we're here to say goodbye to a fine Christian gentleman sho nuff. Was he *Christian*? There's a little *bon mot* with a barb in it that runs, "If Christianity were against the law, would there be enough evidence to convict you?" Huh? Howzabout it? Well, if that were the case, George would be headed for Sing Sing. Not only was there that long list of work and service and worship I cataloged earlier, but the way he did

it. If you're part of church that follows the lectionary, you know we're reading Ephesians right now. Ephesians is the book that tells us what the world and we would be like if Christians got it all right. Well, dealing with George was like meeting a chapter of Ephesians: gentle, kind, courteous, compassionate, generous, patient, self-effacing and on and on and on, one of those Pauline lists of the fruits of Christian conversion. George incarnated all that. Was he a *gentleman*? In two ways. I was taught that manners are an expression of our consideration for others. Well, George's must have been immense. I figure I'm one of the rudest people around, and I know four or five of you out there who would agree, but honest to God, I never saw George do anything rude. Ever. Always courteous, all but courtly, so careful to go and take the lowest place, so quiet and helpful. Civility in a suit of clothes. Beyond that, the man was gentle. I think he was a sweet man, but men don't like to be called sweet, so gentle will have to do, and there was nobody gentler. Lord. He presided in the Constitution and Canons Committee, a dozen or so strong-willed people with plenty strong opinions, and though I've not attended any meetings, the story gets around. When things got . . . tense . . . George always poured soothing oil on the roiling waters. As Fr Stanford pointed out in a message to the clergy earlier this week, when the deliberations got disputatious, George always slowed things down, lifted everybody's sights, and recalled them to the higher principle. And the work went forward with great dignity and accomplishment. Yes, a very gentle man indeed, a Fine. Christian. Gentleman.

And so now we have to say goodbye to all that, and it's not a bit of fun. But it's not really Goodbye. It's So long, because we'll all be together again. That's what the resurrection is all about, rejoining and rebuilding and renewing, and that's where George is now. So we just bring ourselves to do it, even if it really hurts. And I know it's a cliché, George, but the words have hardly ever been more true: we will MISS you.