

Michael Buendia Funeral

June 5, 2023

Homily by Fr. David Carter

Reading of Michael's Obituary...

The Angel of death has swept through our community. He took our elders and we wept. Now he has struck our youth in his prime. Our hearts grieve. There are tears in our eyes. I myself am not untouched by sorrow at his loss. I knew Michael as a friend as well as a pastor. We all have asked the question, "Why, O Lord?" We are a people of faith, but still our hearts question. And rightly so. It is not wrong to seek understanding. It is not wrong for our hearts to question. But we must also guard our hearts and seek wisdom in a time of grief.

There is wisdom in suffering, if we have eyes to see and ears to hear. This is hard-fought and hard-won wisdom for sure. We are all asking questions and trying to understand this moment. It is a tragic moment. This was a relatively young man, a husband of only five years and father of two young children. Lord, we don't understand. Tears come to our eyes, and we grieve. Give us wisdom. I searched for wisdom before the Lord. I didn't know what I would say to you today. I asked God to guide me in understanding. He gave me a word from His word. It was found in Psalm 88.

O Lord, my God, I call for help by day;
I cry out in the night before you.
² Let my prayer come before you,
incline your ear to my cry!
³ For my soul is full of troubles,
and my life draws near to Sheol.
⁴ I am reckoned among those who go down to the Pit;
I am a man who has no strength,
⁵ like one forsaken among the dead,
like the slain that lie in the grave,
like those whom you remember no more,
for they are cut off from your hand.
⁶ You have put me in the depths of the Pit,
in regions dark and deep.
⁷ Your wrath lies heavy upon me,
and you overwhelm me with all your waves.
⁸ You have caused my companions to shun me;
You have made me a thing of horror to them.
I am shut in so that I cannot escape;
⁹ my eye grows dim through sorrow.
Every day I call upon you, O Lord;
I spread out my hands to you.
¹⁰ Do you work wonders for the dead?
Do the shades rise up to praise you?

- ¹¹ Is your steadfast love declared in the grave,
or your faithfulness in the place of destruction?
¹² Are your wonders known in the darkness,
or your saving help in the land of forgetfulness?
¹³ But I, O Lord, cry to you;
in the morning my prayer comes before you.
¹⁴ O Lord, why do you cast me off?
Why do you hide your face from me?
¹⁵ Afflicted and close to death from my youth,
I suffer your terrors; I am helpless.
¹⁶ your wrath has swept over me;
Your dread assaults destroy me.
¹⁷ They surround me like a flood all day long;
they close in upon me together.
¹⁸ You have caused lover and friend to shun me;
my one companion is darkness.

I received that word when I heard it as Jesus speaking directly to my heart. In this season of death in our community, I believe many of our hearts can pray this same psalm in the darkness of our grief. But this is the wisdom the Lord gave me: this is Jesus' own prayer to the Father as he was facing death. Tradition holds that these are the words prayed by Jesus when He had been handed over to death and was imprisoned in a pit made for criminals. Imagine Jesus in the darkness of that pit, facing certain death, and He prayed this prayer of lament and grief. I believe Jesus gave those words to me to share with you - to say that He is not far from our grieving hearts. He knows the thoughts and emotions of our hearts. He walks this path of suffering with us. He is here in the darkness with us. We may not be able to see Him, we may not sense His presence always, but He is here nonetheless. "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff comfort me." (Psalm 23:4).

This was beyond our ability to control. But God had a hand in this, in his Providence. We do not know the extent of it, but we have hints, shadows and whispers that give us hope. We heard the Book of Wisdom say "he who pleased God was snatched away, lest wickedness pervert his mind or deceit beguile his soul . . . For his soul was pleasing to the Lord, therefore he sped him out of the midst of wickedness." Wisdom, be attentive. We do not understand why the Lord took Michael when and how he did, but the Lord's wisdom whispers to us to trust that this was for his greater good. This is a wisdom that is hard to swallow. But the Lord gave us other aids to assist us in our darkness.

His death was surrounded by faith. Michael had a unique gift of gathering priests around him. His padres. There were three priests at his wedding- I was one of them. There were three priests surrounding his death bed, I was one of them. There are three priests at his funeral, and I know two more who would have been here if they could have. Is this not God's providence? How many of us could boast that so many of Jesus's own personal ministers were attendant to them at the most important times of life? Is this not a sign to us that His hand was involved? I don't rightly understand it, but it is a handhold of hope in the darkness of our grief. There is a higher power at work here.

Michael was blessed with the rich gift of family, parents, siblings, many aunts and uncles and friends so close they are like family. A loving wife, with supportive in-laws who are just as devastated at this loss as if he were their own son. When his sickness came on all of the sudden, this network of support sprang into action. When he took a turn for the worst, they surrounded him and Karmel with a layer of comfort and protection to face the worst, without being alone. Is this not God's providence? How many suffer in isolation and loneliness? Is this not a sign to us that God has a hand in this? I don't rightly understand it, but it is another handhold of hope in the pit of darkness. There is a higher power at work here.

Wisdom tells us in moments like this we have to take the long view of history. Jesus told his disciples, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me. . . I will come back and take you to myself." We were never meant to stay here for eternity. We were not made just for this world, though we may be fond of it and attached to it for right reasons. I don't rightly understand how this will work out, why the widow and orphans have to mourn, but Michael has gone before us to where we all hope to one day go. And I believe that God will provide for those who remain in the same unseen ways he provided for the one we lost. I believe this. At night there are tears, but with dawn comes rejoicing (Psalm 30:5).

Mother Theresa taught her sisters a very simple spirituality in this regard. After her death it was revealed that she suffered a prolonged dark night of the soul in which consolations ceased and she experienced a great spiritual emptiness. And yet, she summed up her spirituality of total trust in God's providence in the simple phrase: "Take what he gives and give what he takes." Wisdom, be attentive. The Lord gave us Michael for 43 years. The Lord has now taken Michael and we have to offer him back to the Lord. This is what wisdom teaches us, this is what our faith teaches us. Whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.

The angel of death cannot touch those marked with the Blood of the Lamb, who was slain on the cross. The blood which we now offer on this altar for Michael's sake. The blood that touched Michael's lips in his first holy communion and in all of the communions of his life and which now is his pledge of entry into the halls of heaven. Today, we offer that same sacrifice for Michael, and we will partake of it ourselves when we share communion with the life, death, and resurrection of the One who has the final say over our own lives. And His word is trustworthy: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." May these words guide us through our own dark night and the pit of grief into the light of faith.