

**( Continued)**

**One might say he was a “riot” man for he ended up in Manila on sabbatical in the middle of the riots there. The best experience of his priesthood was being appointed pastor of St. Antoninus, a daunting prospect of having to fill the shoes of Fr. Jim Ferry, who was a mentor & leader to so many of the priests as well as people. He got the call in the convent after Mass. If he wanted the parish, he could have it. Fr. Ferry specifically requested Fr. Paul to be the next pastor. He recognized the priestly gifts of Fr. Paul. He was a priests’ priest. St. A’s was always a place of refuge for burned out priests, priests having a problem, priests ready to throw in the sponge or priests the Archdiocese didn’t know what to do with. Fr. Jim welcomed them, settled them in, told them when prayer times were, gave them a bucket & told them to go & start washing the 3rd floor windows...therapy, they could see the results of their labor...the window was dirty & then it was clean...a sense of accomplishment at a very basic level. As time went on, he moved them from cleaning windows to cleaning souls...& that is where Fr. Paul came in. He sent the priests to him for confession & direction. When Fr. Paul got that phone call, he was humbled, moved, excited honored & nervous. How could he ever fill the shoes of Fr. Ferry who was God’s cheerleader, who, once he caught the Spirit, went everywhere infecting everyone with the FIRE of the Spirit including over 70,000 people 2 years in a row in the 70’s. in Giants & Shea Stadiums. People even sold their houses to move to be near St. A’s & the FIRE of love that was erupting here. The thought of filling those shoes was intimidating to say the least. But in time, he found his own pace & found his own shoes fit fine for the walk through the years of service at St. A’s. Just look at the outpouring of love from all over the world. Fr. Ferry was God’s Charismatic cheerleader & Fr. Paul was God’s charismatic contemplative. He took us into deeper waters of prayer & contemplation, a direction the Renewal had to go in if it’s a valid movement of God. He was a faithful prayer warrior & exhorted us all to have serious prayer time daily. He prayed the Office daily.**

**Fr. Ferry always taught us to be fruit inspectors in the process of discernment. And those Galatian fruits were so amply present in Fr. Paul. The love, the joy, the peace, the patience (with people, not with waiting in line), kindness, gentleness, generosity...he insisted that any resources slated for his 50th anniversary celebration be used to build homes for the poor in the Philippines, thus giving birth to the Fr. Paul Lehman village which has grown exponentially &**

already yielded college graduates. Upon learning of his last days, they did a non-stop novena for him. His graciousness & kindness are legendary. His door & his heart were always open whether in the rectory, his lakehouse, the Kelley residence for retired priests or his last stop, his room in the nursing home in Caldwell. "Come!" he would boom out. Like the King he served, he was gentle & full of compassion but when it came to matters of faith & doctrine & unadulterated truth as it was handed down by Christ & the apostles, he could give St. Anthony of Padua, who was known as the Hammer of Heretics, a run for his money. He was stalwart & insistent on the truths of the faith & he inculcated that in us & we embraced it & wanted MORE for we knew what we were getting was a firm foundation we could build on & not some shifting sands of moral relativism.

From St. A's, he went on to serve the BLD community wherever Newark opened a district literally across the country & he served them unstintingly & lovingly. People just wanted to be around him for he exuded goodness. When he entered a place, faces lit up & they gravitated to him for they knew a loving father was present & he had their back spiritually, just by being there.

So what is this about something good coming out of Elizabeth? It has to do with Nathaniel who asked if anything good could come out of Nazareth & we all know Who that was. And the One Who came out of Nazareth had this to say about Nathaniel: *Here is a true Israelite. There is no duplicity (guile) in him.* And on the feast of St. Bartholomew, aka, Nathaniel, I always wished Fr. Paul Happy Feast Day which caught him off guard for it is not a feast of St. Paul, but I could hear in my heart Jesus saying: *Here is a true priest. There is no guile in him.* Just holiness.

Yes we need to grieve & mourn for we suffer from the anguish of separation & in the roller coaster of emotions, we also know we need to rejoice for he ran the race spectacularly well & hopefully has won the crown. Keep praying for him.

And as I was trying to process all this, I was having a difficult prayer time & it was like an admonition from him wherever he is in the spirit world & it came through the Breviary readings of a saint at the other end of the age spectrum. He died at 23. St. Aloysius Gonzaga had this to say to my heart & really all of our hearts.

***Take care, above all things, not to insult God's boundless loving kindness. You would certainly do this if you mourned as dead one living face to face with God, one whose prayers can bring you in your troubles more powerful aid than they ever could on earth. And our parting will not be for long, we shall see each other again in heaven; we shall be united with our Savior; there we shall praise Him with heart & soul, sing of His mercies forever & enjoy eternal happiness. When He takes away what He once lent us, His purpose is to store our treasure elsewhere more safely & bestow on us those very blessings that we ourselves would most choose to have. (St. Aloysius Gonzaga)***

**This is Fr. Paul's legacy, a legacy of love. This is what he was called to & this is what he is calling us to. So let us do our very best to eventually join him in our true home....heaven. Let us follow Him Who led Fr. Paul, so graciously submitted to being led.**