



We All have the Hope of Heaven...

HEAVEN

I recently attended the funeral of a good friend, a brother priest, Fr. Bill Sangiovanni—known to his friends as “Sange.” A marvelous, great priest, late to the vocation, and a great principal and president of Notre Dame High School in Fairfield.

Sange and I had a common meeting place in Fairfield: The 7-11. At 5:30 or 6am, we’d meet there - each of us getting coffee. One morning I told the clerk that I would pick up Bill’s tab – not remembering he was a lover of newspapers... New York Times, Ct Post, New York Post, Daily News. That day when the clerk rang up his tab I said, “Sange – you owe me!”

But he was just a magnificent, great priest. At Notre Dame High School, no matter where you walked, he put up signs everywhere: “BE IMITATORS OF CHRIST.” This gentle, unconventional priest followed the great High Priest, who was also unconventional. He was a believer that you and I are called to be imitators of Jesus Christ.

To be an administrator and principal is not an easy job...you’re dealing with students, families, parents, faculty members...trying to help them with life’s ups and downs...

But Fr. Bill wanted to try to win them over because he himself was an imitator of Jesus Christ. Throughout his priesthood he wore the face of Christ no matter where he went.

When I read scriptures about getting to heaven, I think no doubt that Bill is enjoying heaven. You and I - we all - have hope of heaven’s kingdom. As followers, we can’t just say, “I believe in Christ.” Yes, it’s important to believe...to have faith...but you and I are called to be His imitators. As His disciples, we are called to put on the face of Jesus Christ – not just here, but everywhere. Not always easy.

To be a disciple sometimes means sacrifice. It sometimes means pain and suffering. Fr. Bill had suffering to its core – but he hid it as best he could. He never wanted to let on, because he understood the challenge of being a disciple in good days and bad – the challenge to carry on.

We’re all a work in progress. As God has made us in His image and likeness, there’s hope! Each day, His grace helps us to be the newest, better and best versions of ourselves. The ways we live our lives will win us heaven.

There’s a joke about a priest who stands up from the altar and says, “Everyone from this parish is going to hell.” He hears laughing from the back row, which enrages him. So he says it again, “Everyone from this parish is going to hell.” More laughter from the back row. So the priest says, “Sir, did you not hear me?” The man in the back row stands up and says, “Yes, I heard what you said, but I’m not a member of this parish!”

Heaven is indeed within our reach - it is our hope. We are called to hear the voice of God each and every day. We will get to heaven if we listen to Him...if we become imitators of Jesus Christ. Like Fr. Bill Sangiovanni. A man who emulated love and mercy. You and I can change the world. But we’re only going to do it by being imitators of Jesus Christ.

Every day He graces us with new ways – better ways – better versions of ourselves. Accept the challenge as He calls your name. Accept the challenge to put your faith in action, to carry the face of Christ, to reflect His goodness, mercy and kindness. In His Love,

Msgr. Walter C. Orlowski
Dean and Pastor