

God blesses us so abundantly that we can honestly, and even enthusiastically, praise God even when we mourn. We can praise God for blessing Bill so richly. Bill enjoyed the blessing of a long life, 99 years, a span of time sometimes used to indicate a duration so long that it's not any concern. And Bill enjoyed the blessing of the use of his faculties almost up until the very end.

I had the privilege of meeting Bill for the first time a few months ago. It was the first, or one of the first, pastoral visits I made after I began as Rector of Advent. One purpose of the visit was for me to receive from Bill a major gift to the church, which Bill intended to fund our outreach, formation, evangelism, and growth efforts. Receiving such extraordinary generosity would be humbling under any circumstances, but all the more so because of Bill's own humility, his plainspoken determination to accomplish his goal, and his deep, abiding faith all were readily apparent. I considered it a great honor to be trusted by Bill and to be greeted warmly by him. Meeting Bill made me want to be a better priest and a better person.

All of these qualities undoubtedly contributed to Bill's exemplary military service. Serving in any organization involves an element of humility. And I had a hunch that whatever Bill had done for our country was something great. I had never heard of a torpedo bomber before, so I looked it up. This was a fixed-wing aircraft that dropped torpedoes into the water, which would then go on

to do what torpedoes do. Being a torpedo bomber pilot sounded challenging, but then I went on to read just how exceptionally dangerous this combat role was: until they dropped their payloads, the pilots had to fly low and slow, making them easy targets. According to Wikipedia, “during the Battle of Midway... virtually *all* of the American torpedo bombers... were shot down by the Japanese.”

For such a pilot to come home at all would be impressive in itself, but Bill was highly decorated for his heroism and extraordinary achievement. It's important to remember that accomplishments like that can only come from the strongest personal character, determination and faith that made Bill who he was in every season of his life.

Meeting Bill only in the last season of his life meant I got merely a glimpse of his character, but obviously, it made an impact. As great as his military and professional civilian accomplishments are, that was only part of his life. His relationship with his wife Evelyn is an epic love story, from getting married on Bill's 21st birthday, the very first day his state allowed him to marry, to expressing their affection for each other well into their 90s, their 78 years of marriage, and the beautiful family they created are all evidence of inner greatness.

But underlying, or perhaps overshadowing, all of this was Bill's devoted relationship with God. Although he was never showy about it, Bill was a man of profound faith. He served God every way he knew how, and was an especially dedicated parishioner of Advent.

Now Bill's faith has been rewarded with what must have been a warm and enthusiastic welcome in heaven. The readings his family chose are just right to express the love, grace, and faithfulness with which Bill reflected the image of God. In his way, Bill's life was an image, a reflection, of the infinite diversity of possibilities that exist within God, all of which come into being through love.

As much as any of us can accomplish, we inevitably hit our limits. Even the most productive lives run their earthly courses. Fortunately, God is able to do infinitely more for us than we could imagine, let alone do, and God is not a passive spectator. When we reach our limits, God meets us, wherever we may be, even in the darkest, most hopeless places. Even at the grave. Especially at the grave, which Jesus Christ himself made into a bed of hope, by resting in the tomb before bursting forth in glorious victory over death on the first Easter.

True to his divine nature, Jesus was not content to stop there, as impressive as the resurrection itself is. No, Jesus had already

liberated the souls awaiting him and would go on to offer everlasting life to all who live. That is why Christians, while truly sad when the earthly lives of our loved ones come to an end, also rejoice in confidence that they enjoy new life in heaven. The resurrection is the foundation of our faith, the illumination of our world, and the hope that gives us enduring courage. The resurrection is the means by which we look forward to joining God and all our loved ones in heaven, where we will rejoice that Jesus indeed lost none of us. For as much as any of us can bless others during our time on this Earth, God is the one whose blessings never come to an end.

Bill asked that the homily at his funeral end with the poem, "I am free," by Robert M. Burcham, a request I am happy to honor.

Don't grieve for me, for now I'm free
I'm following the path God laid for me.
I took his hand when I heard him call.
I turned my back and left it all.
I could not stay another day
to laugh, to love, to work or play.
Tasks undone must stay that way.
I found that peace at close of day.
If my parting has left a void
then fill it with remembered joy.

A friendship shared, a laugh, a kiss,
ah, yes these things I too will miss.
Be not burdened with times of sorrow.
I wish you the sunshine of tomorrow.
My life's been full, I've savored much,
good friends, good times,
a loved one's touch.
Perhaps my time seemed all too brief,
don't lengthen it now with undue grief.
Lift up your hearts and share with me
God wanted me now:
He set me free.