

Rev. William O'Halloran, SJ
March 4, 2008

Bishop Reilly, Fr. Higgins, Acting Provincial, Fr. Hayes, fellow priests, Martha, Susan, Tom and Vincent, your spouses and children, and devoted friends of Fr. Bill O'Halloran:

As a matter of course, Jesus did not go around raising people from the dead. Even in the case of his dear friend Lazarus, he did not do it to spare him from death. Lazarus eventually died, as did Jesus himself. Nor did he do it to give him a few extra years of life. As Martha pointed out pragmatically, if that was what he wanted, it would have been much easier, and less messy, to heal him while he was sick. He did not even do it as a favor to the two sisters, though their emotional pleas brought him to tears. No, as he explained it himself, Jesus performed this miracle, like all those in John's Gospel, to reveal "the glory of God," so that his disciples could see and believe. What that means is that Jesus manifested a power greater than death itself, so that those who believe in him, even in death will live. That means that anyone who lives in Christ and truly believes in his promise can be free of fear, of self-seeking and self-protection, of envy, of despair and all those other oppressive disabilities that flourish under the shadow of death and stunt our full human growth. If we know we are cared for and on one can take away what we truly love in this life, we can afford to think of others rather than ourselves and therefore realize the fullness of our humanity.

While we do not expect to see the miracle of Lazarus literally repeated today, no matter what this Martha may say, nevertheless we have every reason to believe that William O'Halloran too shares in Jesus's promise of life, because in so many ways he also revealed to us "the glory of God."

"The glory of God," or, as we Jesuits rather immodestly like to put it, "the greater glory of God," is something Fr. O'Halloran was thoroughly schooled in, as we all are. St. Ignatius uses that phrase more than 300 times in the Jesuit Constitutions. It is to be our purpose, our guide, the touchstone by which all our commitments are measured. Bill O'Halloran was all about "the greater glory of God." He showed it in those virtues we so admired in him: his compassions, his fidelity, and his freedom. These were more than matters of good character. They are the divine qualities, most often associated with God in the scriptures, incarnate in Jesus Christ and reflected in his disciples.

Bill O'Halloran's immense compassion was felt by everyone who was lucky enough to know him. That has been so evident in the remembrances we have heard in the last few days. He cared about everyone, the humble and needy most of all. It came across in his unfailing kindness and attentiveness, the warmth and joy he brought to every encounter. He was always there for the sick and those in mourning, the lonely and the lost, with a sympathetic ear, a word of consolation and whatever help he could give. Many an overwhelmed student, or even a guilty one, got a break from him. It did not take much to break through the sternness he tried to project as a teacher. We experienced his kindness and generosity in the many ways he contributed to the unique family atmosphere that marks Holy Cross. He presided over the Christmas tree lighting and at the many celebrations recognizing our hardworking and devoted staff. It is impossible even to imagine the end of summer picnic, the service anniversaries, or the Clare Burns awards,

let alone the Jesuit Christmas party, without his commanding presence, his booming but cultured voice, and his witty bon mots. Even more, the casual encounters in the halls and his little visits to various offices, always with a cheerful word and a smile, even perhaps a story or two, brightened everyone's day. He was always upbeat, even at the end when he was evidently quite ill, and never sought anything for himself.

Bill's fidelity was just as impressive. His devotion to his family and friends, the Church, and the Society of Jesus defined him. They were what he lived for. He was an enduring, comforting and inspiring presence in his family, remembered so lovingly by his nieces and nephews, grand nieces and nephews who are here today. It was the same with so many other families that seemed to adopt him, or whom he adopted somehow. You all spoke so fondly last night of his devoted, joyful presence.

His unwavering devotion to the Church, nourished in a devout Catholic family and further strengthened by the brothers at Lasalle Academy and the close-knit Catholic community in Providence, brought him to the Society of Jesus in 1945 and ultimately to the priesthood. He delighted in being a priest and especially in all the good he could do with it. He enriched many families with baptisms, weddings and funerals, and touched many hearts and spirits among students and staff presiding at Mass here on campus, becoming in recent years a fixture at the Wednesday noon liturgy. In Worcester he was also moderator of the First Friday Club, a lively and meaningful devotion for many businessmen in the city. Those formal encounters often opened up opportunities for more personal pastoral care, as many sought him out for help, advice, prayer and absolution. He was always seeking, in the words of St. Ignatius, "the good of souls."

It was, of course, as a member of the Society of Jesus that Fr. O'Halloran served the Church, and that meant every bit as much to him. You could see it in the many stories of fellow Jesuits past and present, the many assignments he had, the places he had been and the people he had served. More significant though was how, as a good Jesuit, he made himself available wherever he was needed. He took on many assignments in a variety of different places, with a wide range of demands and duties. As a young scholastic, after teaching at Boston College High School and earning a degree in psychology at Fordham, he was sent off to Belgium and France for his theological training, which he took to with his usual enthusiasm and panache. Back from Europe he was assigned to teach at Holy Cross, which he did with great distinction, while spending summers as a research fellow at the University of Michigan. When called to be superior of the Jesuit community, he embraced that often thankless task with generosity, intelligence and kindness. When Le Moyne College needed a president, he was off to Syracuse to take on another very demanding job and one that did not necessarily come easily for him. Nevertheless he gave it his all and accomplished a great deal in his five years there. After that he returned to Holy Cross, where he was Vice President for many years and most recently special assistant to the president, filling a variety of not particularly glamorous but essential roles that we will take spend months trying to fill. It did not matter to him what or where the assignment was; he wanted to be where he was most needed.

The other divine virtue we saw so clearly in Fr. O'Halloran was freedom. Some see freedom as opposed to fidelity; but on the contrary one cannot faithfully follow God's will without freedom,

freedom from self-interest, freedom from social pressure and freedom from what is familiar and comfortable. In the same Gospel that gave us the story of the raising of Lazarus, we read, “The wind blows where it will, you hear the sound it makes; but you do not know where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone begotten of the Spirit.” That was Bill O’Halloran.

We have already noted the great freedom he exhibited in his willingness to take on so many different and challenging assignments. Even more telling was the work he did in his early years here at Holy Cross, first with “Raymond,” his dear friend Fr. Raymond Swords and then in the crucial first years of the John Brooks era, transforming Holy Cross in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council and the Thirty-First General Congregation of the Society of Jesus. He came in to help establish and build a modern psychology department and became its first chair. As a Jesuit trustee before separate incorporation, he was part of the transition to a lay board. He was also a key figure in helping smooth the way for co-education. We take these all for granted now; but at the time they were painful and controversial changes, much contested even within the Jesuit community. It took great vision and courage to effect them. Bill O’Halloran was part of that.

On this day when we commend Fr. William O’Halloran to the gracious care of his Savior, it is especially important to be mindful that this is not just a story about a great man whom we loved and admired, but a manifestation of the power of Jesus Christ to touch and transform lives, filling them with God’s glory. There is great consolation in that, because it gives us confidence that he who already shared something of that glory in this life, will now possess it fully in the life to come.