

With sadness yet with Christian hope and trust, we share with you the news of the sudden death of Father Phil Bonvouloir, A.A. He was recently diagnosed with cardiac difficulties, and was found on Saturday morning (April 28, 2012) in his room at the rectory at Saint Anne Saint Patrick Parish in Sturbridge, Massachusetts, where he had been re-assigned as Associate Pastor for the last years of his life.

Father Phil spent his life in service to the coming of the Kingdom of God as an Assumptionist for over 60 years. His ministry took him from Assumption Prep School in Worcester to the Catholic Chaplaincy in Moscow and included years in West Virginia and in Rhode Island. His life and mission touched the lives of students, diplomats, prisoners, parishioners and recently in particular the sick and the elderly.

We are grateful to Father Phil for his years of service and fraternal affection. We express our condolences to his family and his Assumptionist brothers and sisters. May God welcome him into the fullness of life in the heavenly Kingdom.

Homily at the Funeral Mass for Fr. Philip Bonvouloir, AA

By Fr. Dennis Gallagher, A.A.

First of all, I would like to thank Phil's local religious community at St. Anne's - to Peter and Paul and Sal - for caring for him and loving him these last few years. In a small community, the loss of a brother is felt all the more acutely. I'm thinking particularly of Peter who lived and

worked side by side with Phil as brothers and as men of the Church in three different ministries: at Our Lady of Guadalupe in New York City, in Warwick, R.I., and here in Fiskdale.

Thank you also to the St. Anne's parish community. Phil had a diverse range of ministries in his life, but he was here altogether for 13 years, as long as he spent at any assignment, first as pastor and then as senior priest. (Senior Priest was a misnomer - Phil was an associate pastor in everything but name) . The relationship between a priest and the parish he serves can be a beautiful thing, and in Phil's case, I think it was just that.

Thank you, too, to Phil's family of birth, for his parents from whom he was given the faith, to brother Peter who seemed nothing less than a soul mate to him in recent years, to his sisters Annette and Yvette and to the extended family, all five living generations of them. He clearly loved you, and you reciprocated that love.

Phil's death, the timing of it, was something of a blessing, I think. He was the last person to have wanted a prolonged convalescence or a long period of inactivity at the end of his life. Who knows what graces might have been given him if that had been the case, but it would have been less like grace building on nature as much as grace overcoming – shall we say – his somewhat irascible nature.

It's true that Phil was involved in an unusual variety of works in his priestly life, but as time went on, it's pretty clear that he was drawn to serve the poor and the vulnerable and the disenfranchised. The last twenty years of his religious apostolic life were spent among the Latino community in New York and Cranston, R.I., the inmates of the Rhode Island State Prison in Cranston, and here at St. Anne's, where one of his principal responsibilities was to visit and accompany the sick in the parish. Anyone who listened to Phil's homilies knows that there was a certain unvarnished directness about him - although he studied and was ordained a priest in France, there was no "french pastry" in him, if I may use that as a metaphor for pretentiousness and putting on the style. That may be one reason why his generous heart was drawn to serve those who by virtue of their own vulnerability and lack of status were not looking for style points, but someone who was willing to walk along with them without the least hint of superiority.

Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat.... That Phil served the Church and the US region of the Assumptionists in a multitude of ways is a fact. Underlying that fact – and more telling - was his openness to accept a variety of different

assignments – in other words **a willingness to go where he was needed, when he was needed -** a willingness, then, to let his own grain of wheat fall into the ground, so that it might bear the wonderful fruit that it did.

In 2004, Phil was approached by the alumni of Assumption Prep School to ask if he would address them at their annual reunion. The two most traumatic events in the history of the Assumptionists in the US involved the Prep: the hugely destructive tornado in 1953 and the closing of the school in 1970. Like many of his brothers, Phil felt the pain of that closing and he wanted no part of these reunions organized in recent years by Assumption College. But he relented enough to accept this invitation. It was a lovely, lovely talk, and I believe this excerpt offers a window into the meaning of Phil's life and ministry.

As an Assumptionist, my stimulus is Mary, the mother of God and patroness of the Assumptionist Congregation.... Scripture does not speak of Mary as a woman with the future in the palm of her hand. Not such is your experience. Not mine in any case. When, as freshmen, we all walked wide-eyed up the stairs of Assumption High School, we had not God-given scenario for our lives. For me, it was eight years at Assumption, then novitiate in Quebec, 4 years of theology in France, then back to Worcester as teacher, Dean of Discipline, graduate studies at Boston College, tours of pastoral duty in West Virginia, the Soviet Union, Sturbridge, New York City, prison chaplain in Cranston, RI, even poverty, chastity and obedience, these were not revealed by an angel. During those high school days, none of us knew in detail what God was calling us to; we only knew, like Mary, that God was calling us to something. My story and yours would all be written as the years unfolded, as the world grew around us, as I grew. There would be confusion and questions, wonderment and uncertainty, changes and surprises. The message from God was simple: Will you follow me.

So, too, I submit, for me and for each one of you, when God called us to specific stations in life, He revealed very little: the basic call, the bare bones. His invitation didn't include a biography and a script, and so it called for faith and trust, our hand in God's. No rose garden, only that whatever the garden, Eden or Gethsemane, He would be there faithful through all our infidelities. It's true of every vowed existence, husband and wife, priest or religious, the law, dance, music or medicine, commerce or the State house. It's true of the powerful and the powerless. God tells us only enough for us to say yes.

The message from God was simple: Will you follow me. God tells us only enough for us to say yes. There you have it. Perhaps this is the key that discloses the mystery and the fruitfulness of Phil's life: the Marian *fiat***, let it be done unto me according to God's Word.** Or, to return to the grain

of wheat passage, *Whoever serves me will follow me – and where I am, there will my servant be*. The Father will *honor those whoever serves me*. We have it, then, on the word of the one who is incapable of deceit: **the Father will honor whoever serves me.**

God bless you.