

Reflections on Bishop Robert C. Morlino

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In early November, I dialed up Bishop Morlino's mobile telephone number late one evening, as I have done so many times. It was the eve of the United States Conference of Bishops meeting in Baltimore. I wanted to provide encouragement to a man who, as Kevin Phalen recently described him, was "just the messenger" of the true Catholic faith. I did not reach him this night, nor did I get his traditional voicemail greeting to "have a beautiful day in God's presence."

Ten years ago, Peggy Noonan authored a piece for the Wall Street Journal entitled: "Something Beautiful Has Begun." I have since referred to it often during key transitions in the life of our family—graduations, marriage, loss. She was writing about the transition in the papacy—from the affable John Paul II to the philosophical Benedict. It was the eve of Benedict's arrival in the United States, his first trip as Pope.

The central point of her piece—how we make sense of the loss of a man so well known and loved by the faithful (and many others) around the world—was summed up in the distilled message of John Paul's reign: "Be not afraid." These words, "of the angels of the Resurrection, addressed to the women before the empty tomb," Noonan summarized with the condensed message: Nothing has ended, something beautiful has begun, but you won't understand it for a while.

Today, the reality continues to sink in for those of us who knew and loved Fr. Bob. He is no longer reachable on the other end of the phone late at night to share a laugh or provide his reassuring insight into the latest and incredulous national event or policy. We are right there with the women before the empty tomb.

I met Fr. Morlino as a student at Notre Dame. Second to meeting Cathy my wife, the best take-away from my undergraduate days was meeting and developing a life-long friendship with this professor, priest, friend. (The 1977 National Championship comes in close as well.) His instinct to seek and cultivate what he sensed was a calling to help young men consider the priesthood was active—though not as accurate in those early days as it proved to be during his episcopacy. While I wasn't ultimately a candidate, we deepened a relationship that will continue now into eternity.

Between then and now, there were too-many-to-count key moments, memories, and famous quotes that will be shared in thought, prayer, and with good friends in the days, weeks, and years to come. However, I was honored to serve as a pall bearer in his beloved mother Bertha's funeral. And our family was blessed as we cherished the time we shared with the Bishop, including his officiating at our wedding and celebrating Mass at our home on Lake Winnepesaukee on several occasions.

My last phone conversation with him came in the weeks following his August 2018 letter to the faithful regarding the ongoing sexual abuse crisis in the Church—a masterpiece. As the conversation evolved to other topics, he pointed out that the cumulative effect of the failure of the Church to address the many challenges it was facing could be seen in the way family members eulogize their loved ones at funerals. He bemoaned his assessment that we as Catholics increasingly believe we have no consequence to the

way we live our lives, and that on the day of the funeral, too many eulogies appear as “canonizations.” He was invigorated nonetheless to continue his part in the battle to save souls.

Nothing has ended. Something beautiful has begun. We won’t understand it for a while. The vision will not disappoint.