

Fr. Louis Petruha, OFM, Cap

Eulogy by Lou Pioli

I am deeply honored to stand here before you to share with you my thoughts of our dear friend, Fr. Louis. I loved him dearly! You know as I stand here before you in the presence of so many Friars and those in training, beloved brothers of Fr. Louis, I can't help but have great respect for all of them.

So often, too often, we hear of bad examples within the priesthood yet those priests constitute but a small percentage of their vocation. Rarely, if ever, do we hear about one of God's faithful servants, who, like the majority of priests, day in and day out fulfill his ministry in quiet fidelity and love.

The death of a priest is unlike any other it seems. We feel it differently, deeper. We feel that we not only lost a man that we loved but also his unique style. The voice that we heard from the pulpit and publicly speaking so eloquently has been silenced. The hands that once touched us in prayer can no longer be used!

Yet even in Fr. Louis's death on March 31, 2019, he continued to be our example during this Lenten Season. His life passed into the hands of the Lord on Laetare Sunday, the 4th Sunday of Lent, 21 days before Easter. Isn't it coincidental that he should leave us on this particular day? Why? Because, even in death, he was still teaching us, preaching to us. Laetare means *Rejoice*. Rejoice in the midst of this season of sorrow we are enduring. Rejoice for there is Hope. He reminds us that we too will taste great joy as he is now reaping the rewards of his labors. In his own vernacular he's saying, "Keep your socks up!"

Speaking of vernacular, we all know that he had a language of his own, and I'm sure that I didn't know it in its entirety. The first, as I said before, "*Keep your socks up*" ... While in the car driving, "*I don't know where we are, but we're making good time*" ... Greeting children as "*cupcake*" and "*tiger*" ... Speaking to Religious Sisters meeting for the first time, "*What outfit are you in?*" ... Confession, "*Gotta go hear sins.*" And how often would he sprinkle his "*vocation dust*"? And so many more I'm sure you have heard and perhaps can share later.

Fr. Louis was a prayerful man yet he liked to have fun and I'm sure many of you have experienced this side of him. He absolutely loved golf with a passion. We played often and many times poorly. I can remember so vividly his standing on the green getting ready to putt, lifting his eyes to Heaven with his hands folded, and when he made the putt he would say "Thank you, Jesus!"

Oh, how he loved children. I made a post on Facebook while at his bedside in the hospital that basically said, "If Jesus had a twin, it would be Fr. Louis!" We all know that Jesus loved his children and Father certainly answered that call. But he loved everyone.

He touched so many lives both near and far. When we were in Florida the last few years, he made his mark there also. At dinner one evening with two couples and my sister-in-law, one of the men, Joe, told Fr. Louis that he was recently diagnosed with cancer. Before Joe left that evening, Fr. Louis led us in prayer for Joe. How touched Joe was, not being Catholic. Just two nights ago my sister-in-law called me to tell me that Joe wanted to know when Fr. Louis and I were coming to visit. When Joe found out Father had passed, he was deeply saddened. He was looking forward to this visit. This is probably only one of hundreds of stories similar to this.

Over...

On the lighter side, you probably know that Fr. Louis had somewhat of a stubborn streak to him. As we were driving from Bradenton to the Orlando area for my sister's funeral, the rental car had a navigation system ... but that wasn't good enough for Fr. Louis—*HE HAD HIS iPHONE!!* So as we were driving along using both navigation and phone, his concentration was so deeply involved that we drove 15 miles past the required turn and we missed the funeral. But we got to the cemetery in time where he participated in the burial rite. I would frequently call him a stubborn old man (though I'm 4 years older than he). Other times I would call him a Dodo. He would just laugh. Typical!

When we would call each other on the phone it was always, "Hi, it's me." I'll miss that. He loved St. Joe's and all the parishes he guided—and they all loved him.

I was very fortunate to be by his bedside with Fr. Mick, Fr. Greg and the family he loved so dearly. I was able to give him one last hug, one last kiss on the cheek, a rub on his forehead, and hold his hand. I hoped he could hear me talking to him—not just for myself but for all of you who came here to honor the man, the priest and the friar.

On that final day, Laetare Sunday, Fr. Mick celebrated Mass at Fr. Louis' bedside. It was a moving, touching experience to see the Blood of Christ placed on Fr. Louis' lips for the last time.

And so... he went forth. One of the priests of many who won't make the front pages. No newspaper will call him a good and faithful servant. But he wouldn't have wanted that anyway for he was a man of God. Father Louis, may you rest in peace knowing that your heart will continue to beat in all of us. It will beat so hard that we shall never forget you! And so, Father, we say to you, "Well done, good and faithful servant. May you rest in peace and rise in Glory."

"Amen?"

