

October 27, 2020 Post

I am going to try and resume daily reflections to share with you and as we near the end of October we come upon Halloween, Daylight Savings Time, All Saints Day and All Souls Day, all occasioned by the Autumnal Equinox.

The skies have been looked to forever as a source of wisdom, direction, time, and eternity, the skies nourish hearts and minds with ideas and poetries and myths and legends, and we need all of those to make our way through the mystery that is our life.

I am deeply troubled by the need so apparent in our country to “play ball,” any kind of ball, any game at all, at any expense, or so it seems, at all levels and ages and I take note of the difference between little kids playing and “big kids” doing business.

I am well aware that our children need to have lives and we need to have lives and that all of us chafe at the bit of the restrictions that confine and divide us from pursuing our pleasures and our follies but where does our notion of the Church, the People of God, or the Mystical Body of Christ come into play?

That Catholic schools do so well playing football in these times is telling more about them than the scores of the game disclose, in my opinion.

I understand that we are in extremely stressful times and that distractions and entertainments can be necessary antidotes to the toxicity of life in these times but when so many are denied so much, are there not moral questions, human questions to ask about our own behaviors?

I am not saying that we sit and wring our hands, but I do raise the question, what is it that we should be doing when there is such abject misery afflicting so many of us?

What is a human response to suffering that is out of our control as witnessed in not only the pandemic but the wildfires, the hurricanes, the ravages of nature?

I reference the poem by John Donne:

No man is an island,  
Entire of itself.  
Each is a piece of the continent,  
A part of the main.  
If a clod be washed away by the sea,  
Europe is the less.  
As well as if a promontory were.  
As well as if a manor of thine own  
Or of thine friend's were.  
Each man's death diminishes me,  
For I am involved in mankind.  
Therefore, send not to know  
For whom the bell tolls,  
It tolls for thee.

And I offer you the text of a eulogy written and read by the niece/godchild of the deceased at his funeral a few weeks back:

Good morning. Thank you all for being here as we say goodbye Richard Allen Miller. For the most part, Rich was a man who kept to himself. Of course, My mother, his sister, was a constant in his life, and when my grandfather, his father, was alive, the two of them spent quite a bit of time together. I even remember once, when I was little, Grandpa and Uncle Rich crashed our family vacation in Shafer Lake. They said they were "in the neighborhood," and thought they'd stop in and surprise us. Apparently, the two of them got around a bit. But, for most of my life, I only saw my Uncle Rich at the holidays or on special occasions. On Thanksgiving and Christmas, he'd typically be wearing a sweater, and of course, sporting his signature goatee. He liked the turkey legs, I remember, so we'd always save one for him. And no one will ever forget the Thanksgiving with the infamous Hawaiian salad. It's been part of the family lore for years, and I don't think we'll ever stop talking about it. At Christmas, although he never liked singing Carols with us, he would always do his part for the 12 Days of Christmas. And although he didn't have much of anything, ever, he'd always give out gifts. He'd pass out cards with money or gift cards and give one to each of his great nieces and nephews. Most of the time, Uncle Rich spent the holidays quietly in the background. If you could get him to talk, his conversations were typically about old movies he'd watched or food he'd recently cooked, but he didn't

usually have a lot to say. He wasn't easy to connect with. Even my Mom, who talked with him the most, would agree he was a hard man to really get to know. He was a bit odd, socially awkward, some might say *strange*...but there was more to him than that. I suspect he didn't really know HOW to let people in. He probably didn't know he was WORTH getting to know. Maybe Rich didn't always fit in, but Rich *deserves* to be honored. He *deserves* to be respected and remembered for who he was. He was uniquely himself, a true one-of-a-kind, unapologetically *different*.

When you think about who Rich *was*, it might seem easy to dismiss or devalue his life. After all, he lived like a man on a treadmill, always moving forward, but never really going anywhere. But it's when you think about what Rich *wasn't*, that you start to see a bit more. He wasn't one to complain, even when life threw him one bad break and one obstacle after another. When he had no car, he rode his bike. When he had no roof over his head, he went to shelters, no complaints. When he started losing the ability to walk, when he literally had to crawl to his car, he didn't complain. When his TV broke, and he couldn't watch the massive collection of DVDs he had, he listened to his music collection instead, no complaints. He wasn't one to ask for help, either. Recently, as he started to decline, some of the residents at his apartment complex noticed him struggling, and they asked him if they could call his sister, knowing she would help. They asked him repeatedly. But he would always tell them, *No, I'm Fine, I'm Fine*. Rich wasn't always fine, but he didn't want you to know it. He wasn't needy. He wasn't selfish, arrogant, envious, or mean-spirited. Quite the opposite. He was kind and giving. He liked teasing little kids and he loved animals. Once, when he was living in a motel and could barely support himself, he took in a stray cat who then had kittens. He could barely take care of himself, but he took care of that cat and her litter.

You know, I was thinking about those gifts he gave at Christmas. Sometimes, he'd forget to sign the cards. *So Uncle Rich. So quirky. So odd. But also, so telling.* Thinking about that made me realize that he valued his family more than we probably knew, but he *under-valued* himself. His name wasn't even important enough to put on the card. He had so little and he asked for even less. He never asked for ANYTHING. He never even asked for you to *notice* him.

And that's the part that trips me up now the most. That's the part that really chokes me up. Now that he's gone, and I'm reflecting on who he *was* and who he *wasn't*, I see something I never noticed before. I see past his *strange* side, and I see his *strong* side. This was a guy who never had much of anything. No wife or kids, no house, no fulfilling career, no real friends to speak of. Sometimes he

didn't even have the basics. At times, he really struggled. Struggled to even have a roof over his head. Every one of us here would have crumbled living the life he lived, facing the challenges he faced. I for one, would have fallen apart. He was *so*, *so* strong. I never realized it before now because, like I said, he was a person who so easily faded into the background. But he was a part of us, a part of our world, a part of our family.

Last week, when my mom called and told me he had passed, it was warm outside, so I went for a walk to clear my head. As I walked through my neighborhood, a monarch butterfly came out of nowhere, circled around me, and then fluttered away happily. It made me think instantly of my Grandpa Miller, who had butterflies dancing on his grave when we buried him. I felt like Grandpa was sending me a message that he had reunited with his son, his buddy. I pictured Grandpa meeting Rich at the pearly gates and saying, *Rich, it's me, Dad. You're in Heaven!* and Rich saying back, *"Ya, I know, I know."*

Well, Uncle Rich, I hope you do know...you were loved, you were special, you were worth it, and you will be missed.