*Fr. Joseph H. Casey, S.J.: 13 October 1917 – 27 February 2015*

Homily: Fr. Ronald K. Tacelli, S.J.

March 4, 2015

**Fr. Joseph H. Casey, S.J. (1917 - 2015)**

It feels strange to be here celebrating Fr. Joe Casey’s funeral Mass. Joe was one of those people you figured would always be around, would always be there to talk with; someone whose hope-filled voice would always be waiting for you at the other end of a quick phone call; someone whose energy and enthusiasm death and illness would never be able to extinguish. And yet here we are today, gathering in sadness at the loss of someone who meant so much to so many. But of course we also gather together as Christians, living in the hope that God has taken Joe to himself and that death has not extinguished the love that was the hallmark of his long life.

For much of his life as a priest Joe taught Philosophy—and specifically Natural Theology, the Philosophy of God, the sometimes dry and abstract study of various “proofs” for the existence of the Creator of the universe. I was one of Joe’s students way way back. He was a formidable dialectician and could be devastating in argument. But lecturing was not his strong suit, and in the early days, before the changes brought about by Vatican II, when he had to lecture in Latin, his impressionistic grasp of that ancient tongue earned him the untranslatable nickname “hodie die” Casey.

Around 1970, during a sabbatical, Joe was able to make an intensive study of analytic philosophy, which was then in its heyday. He introduced this new way of philosophizing into his courses both at Weston and at Boston College with considerable success. In fact Joe wrote one of the first (and one of the best) articles bringing the newest techniques of analytic philosophy into dialogue with more traditional ways of approaching questions about the existence and nature of God.

I say this not simply to underline one of Joe’s intellectual accomplishments, but rather to emphasize how remarkably open Joe became to whatever could help him and others more deeply appropriate the one thing that mattered most to him, the thing that was at the very center of his being: life in Jesus Christ.

Joe had the belief, one that he expressed to me—and I’m sure to some of you—many times that *everything* a Christian does is transformed by the life of grace, by the presence of the Holy Spirit. “Christian love,” he said, “sharing in the divine nature, transforms the Christian’s entire life....[By] imitating Jesus...Christians...reveal how to live a good human life in a fallen world.” “The Christian,” he insisted, “lives a Eucharistic life so that all he or she does is to be offered at Mass along with Jesus’ sacrifice.”

Joe believed that each person has a special role to play in creation, a vocation that is absolutely unique to each one of us. God, he said, calls each person just as *this* unique individual “to work with him to transform the world into a world of love, of peace, of prosperity for all....”

Joe considered it part of his calling as a Jesuit priest to help people discover their vocation, their calling, their unique role in God’s creation; and thus to help people love and appreciate *themselves.* This, I think, is what accounted for his tremendous ability to listen attentively and sympathetically to other people—an ability that seemed to increase with his advancing years. And it makes understandable the incredible number of people who sought him out as confessor, counselor, and spiritual director. When you were with Joe—and I can say this from personal experience over many years—you had the feeling that he was *with* you, open to you, really hearing you and not judging you. A woman who had seen Joe over many years for spiritual direction said to me when she learned of his death, “I can’t even begin to say what it meant to have Fr Casey in my life. He was God’s gift to me.” I think many of us could say the same.

In conclusion, I’d like to quote from one of the last things Joe published—his book called *Guiding Your own Life on the Way of the Lord Jesus: Liberated by the Profound Theologian Germain Grisez.* The title itself shows something important about Joe—apart from his enthusiastic embrace of the New Natural Law Theory of his dear friend Germain Grisez. It shows his unfeigned humility, his willingness simply to reflect the light of another’s sun—so long as he believed that its radiance was the true light of Jesus Christ. In any case, I think you’ll agree that this passage illustrates Joe’s deep faith in Christ, a faith that gave him hope, a hope that gave him joy, a joy that gave him that remarkably youthful spirit his friends and family will miss so much, a spirit we pray we’ll meet again in the new life to come.

What the world will be like in another 13.7 billion years and how Christ’s church will be affecting its development we cannot imagine. Our role is to pray, to discern and embrace our personal vocation—to follow wherever it leads and leave the results to God. For indeed “We are workers, not master builders, ministers not messiahs. We are prophets of a future that is not our own.”

**Ronald K Tacelli, SJ**

**Campion Center**

**4 May 2015**