

Funeral Mass
Matthew Joseph Walsh
February 2, 2004
10:00 AM
Corpus Christi Church
Upper Gwynedd, Pennsylvania

Scripture Readings: Wisdom 4, 7-15; I Corinthians 12:31 – 13:13; John 14, 1-6

Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone,
Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone,
Silence the pianos and with muffled drum
Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come.

Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead
Scribbling on the sky the message He Is Dead,
Put crepe bows round the white necks of the public doves,
Let the traffic policemen wear black cotton gloves.

He was my North, my South, my East and West,
My working week and my Sunday rest,
My noon, my midnight, my talk, my song;
I thought that love would last for ever: I was wrong.

The stars are not wanted now: put out every one;
Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun;
Put away the ocean and sweep up the wood;
For nothing now can ever come to any good.

The words of the poet, W. H. Auden, are searing in their candor, as we all mourn the loss of our Matthew. To Dede, Jason, Adam and Joseph, to Mr. & Mrs. Walsh, Mr. & Mrs. Victor, Bill, John, Thomas, Peter and Christopher, your spouses and families – I know I speak for everyone here today in saying that we are with you in your loss. Our hearts go out to you. We have held you in prayer and in our hearts and we will continue to do so. For so many of us here, Matt Walsh was a compass in our lives – indeed he was our north, our south, our east and west – our working week and our Sunday rest. His death leaves us with a hallow-ness in our hearts that the poet's words articulate with great

clarity. How can this be? It is not possible. One so young, so full of life and energy, who represented so much of what we are all called to be; taken from us. Oh yes. This is a tough one for all who have loved Matthew Walsh. How will we ever get through it?

The poet, Auden, is giving voice to a raw feeling of grief – the truth of how we feel. But the poem doesn't express the whole truth, the eternal truth of what we believe. Left as it is, we would despair, for sure. But – even in the midst of pain, there is hope. And, that hope, I believe, was known very intimately to the one whose death we mourn – it is the hope that is given to us by Jesus Christ, who rescues us from death. Matthew's death when viewed through the eyes of the faith that he held so deeply is still *oh* so sad for all who loved him, but it is not without hope and it is not without meaning for us. As we heard in our first reading from the Book of Wisdom, "the just man, though he die early, shall be at rest. Having become perfect in a short while, he reached the fullness of a long career; for his soul was pleasing to the Lord, therefore he sped him out of" this world.

I do not believe that God causes death – He loves us, He does not make us suffer! Death is part of the painful reality of the limitation of this world. It is part of nature and it will come to all of us. Instead, God rescues us from death – He saves us through His son, Jesus Christ! Matt's faith in Jesus was a central part of his life, and it is surely his salvation in death. There is so much to reflect on in Matt's life – so many various dimensions to the life of such a wonderful person. But, in the midst of our pain and sorrow, it is good for us to look to his faith – and to look to Jesus Christ for hope and for the fulfillment of the promises of faith that Matt held so dearly throughout his life on

earth. In doing so, it is also good for us to look to Matt himself and to how he lived out his faith in all his relationships and in his abiding, faithful love.

In the course of nearly thirty years of friendship with Matt Walsh, I was privileged to come to know something of his faith. As a teenager at Lansdale Catholic, Matt's faith inspired me. His friendship encouraged my vocation to the priesthood, and his encouragement and support never waned over the years. I share a personal story knowing that so many of us here knew Matt's loyalty and faithfulness. On Wednesday of last week, the day that God called him home, Matt was supporting me through a tragedy in our family. He was present on that morning for the funeral Mass of my sister's stepson, my nephew – another Matthew, Matt DiNicola. As he was leaving me after the funeral – after his usual words of encouragement, he gave me a hug and said “you know I will always be there for you.” That was Matt Walsh – not just for me, but for many other people who knew him as well. His love was truly an icon of the love of Jesus Christ, who assured his Apostles on the night before he died, “do not let your hearts be troubled; have faith in God and faith in me. In my father's house there are many dwelling places. Otherwise, how could I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you. I am going to prepare a place for you and I will come back to take you with me so that where I am you also might be.” Thomas the apostle the doubter – whom by the way, I seem to recall Matthew having some great sympathy for because he had the courage to raise some tough questions! – Thomas, says to Jesus “we don't know what you are talking about. We don't know where you are going, how can we know the way!” Matt knew the answer and followed it in his life – Jesus says – “I am the way, and the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except through me.”

Jesus is the one who is truly always there for us with His enduring love. St. Paul reminds us in our second reading today that everything else will pass away except faith, hope and love, and the greatest of these is love. The love that comes to us in Jesus Christ – a love which shaped the life of Matt Walsh – never goes away.

It is so fitting for us to gather for this Mass at Corpus Christi Church. As many of you know, Matt and Dede have been parishioners of Saint Anthony's in Ambler for just about all their married life, but since the new Church is still some six weeks from completion, we have returned to the parish of his youth – where he grew up. It was here that Matt's faith was nurtured. By his loving and faith-filled parents, Shirley and Bill, and by other family members and coaches, teachers and mentors in this community. It was here too, in this Church named in honor of the Holy Eucharist – the Body of Christ, that Matthew's devout faith in the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist was formed – by his parents, by Father Doyle, whom he always recalled so fondly, and other priests and by the Sisters of Saint Joseph. As many of you know, Matt could weave quite a story when he got going – at times, rather lengthy stories, that even the most devoted and attentive among us could find hard to follow let alone stick with him on! “Land the plane Matt!” we would say. Who could forget the great story of the, I presume, late, Sister Tarcisius? Don't worry Mrs. Walsh, I will not go into the whole story! But one of the greatest twists of the tale was Matt's discovery that the patron of Sister Tarcisius, Saint Tarcisius, was the patron saint of altar boys and first communicants – who had given his life in defense of the Blessed Sacrament!

In many ways, Matthew never lost his child-like reverence and appreciation for the real presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. How often his reverence inspired

others. How fitting it was as well for Matthew to go to God on the feast of Saint Thomas Aquinas, perhaps the greatest theologian in the church's history who articulated our faith's understanding of the doctrine of the real presence, and who composed so many of the most familiar hymns to the Blessed Sacrament that are a part of our Catholic worship. Matt Walsh was a believer. I realize now that the Communion which he received on the morning of January 28th became his Viaticum, the food for the journey from death to life. Later on that day, Matt left me a voice mail in which he commented on the Mass that morning, and specifically mentioned the consecration of the Eucharist as being for him a expression of the powerful presence of Jesus in the Church – bringing healing and hope. Though Matt never lost the devotion that he surely learned as a child here at Corpus Christi, I believe that his faith grew deeper and more profound through the years. Like Saint Paul again in our second reading, – when he was a child, he used to talk as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when he became a man he grew in the depth of his understanding.

Matthew knew that in the Eucharist we have a real living expression of Jesus – our friend and brother – our Lord and savior – who gives Himself to us and says quite literally – “see, I will always be there for you.” In the Eucharist we not only have the Lord with us here and now, but we have a pledge of the future glory that God promises us. To paraphrase St. Paul – in the bread and wine at present, “we see indistinctly, as in a mirror, but then, we shall see face to face and know fully even as we are known – we shall live forever in the love that never goes away.

The death of my dear friend Matt Walsh challenges me – as he challenged me in life – to deepen my faith. In his death, as in his life, he challenges all of us who knew

and loved him to strive to be ever more fully the people that God has created us to be, and to respond to God's call in our lives. Matthew's death invites all of us who have known him in this life – regardless of our faith – to look at our relationship with God and to seek to come to know more intimately the true face of God which we Catholics believe is revealed so powerfully in the Eucharist – the face of a God who loves us, and who calls us to love as we are loved. Knowing that Matthew believed in Jesus, and trusted in God's enduring love is a great consolation to all of us who mourn his passing.

Matthew, my friend, we will miss you more than words can say. But, when we get beyond the tears and pain, there is a wonderful feeling of gratitude for all the joy, for all the energy and exhilaration with which you lived, for all the life and love you have shared with us. We will never forget you. I believe in my heart that you live in the enduring love of Jesus. I pray that you will soon see face to face what you saw only partially in this life, as in a mirror. Much is indeed lost in your passing from this world, but, by God's good grace, faith, hope and love remain, and the greatest of these is love.

Monsignor Tim Senior