

Homily for the Funeral Mass of Patrick Firman William Callahan
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As I pondered preaching at this morning's funeral Mass for Patrick Callahan, I was drawn to the words of Psalm 57:8 "**My heart is steadfast, O God; my heart is steadfast.**" These words are the motto of the Pontifical North American College in Rome where I was blessed to study. They are well-chosen for the heart of a seminarian eager to be prepared for a life sacred service by drawing close to the Lord. However, I also find a certain sense of comfort in them as I reflect with you on our dearly departed brother in Christ.

You see, in Latin, "My heart is steadfast" is rendered, "*Firmum est cor meum*" and that first word is awfully similar to Patrick's first middle name, Firman, probably an Irish misspelling of the Latin. Nonetheless, Steadfast is an incredibly applicable means of describing Patrick Firman William Callahan, a true man of the Church.

Everyone here – and there are many today – can tell a story about Patrick. He was such a fixture here, in this Church, that it seems impossible he is no longer with us. Given his steadfast heart, it also seems less than credible that it was ultimately his heart that failed him. But thankfully, his soul, united with God at the moment of his baptism, was steadfastly united with Christ.

Patrick was the first of nine children born to Firman Callahan, a typical Irishman and his mother, Joenetta Gebhardt of German ancestry. Both were intensely Catholic. Patrick and the next five of his siblings were born in Saint Cloud, Minnesota, where his dad worked as a chef for the Veterans Administration. Patrick's dad was transferred to Columbia near the end of World War II, and it was here the family established deep roots. They arrived when Saint Peter's was the only Catholic Church in town and, except for his stint in the Army, it was the only Church a teenage and adult Patrick Callahan would ever know.

Firman Callahan believed his family should be present whenever the Church was open and that meant the Callahans' practically lived at Saint Peter's – before, during and after school, and of course late at night during Adoration as Firman and Patrick took the most difficult to fill and inconvenient hours. And to lead them, naturally, was an Irish priest – a transplant from the old country – Monsignor Murphy. The bond they had was tight. It was an era when priests were respected and their word was law. Patrick grew to be Monsignor Murphy's right-hand man.

He was his senior altar server much as he was mine and Father Fryml's at daily Mass up until the week before his final hospitalization. Monsignor Murphy saw great potential in Patrick and encouraged him to spend a year in the Seminary. And so, right out of High School, Patrick went to study with the Benedictine's at Saint Bernard's College in Cullman, Alabama. It was, perhaps, the one time the good Monsignor got it wrong. While Patrick had a calling to serve the Church – it wasn't as a priest!

As the oldest son, Patrick was expected to be responsible for his younger siblings. It is possible Kathleen Folkes, his sister-in-residence here at Saint Peter's, may still be shaken by how he exercised his leadership. You see, Patrick was the one his parents delegated to drive his brothers and sisters where they needed to go – and his legendary and heavy lead foot insured they always had an extra reason and time to pray! I'm told in this way, Patrick inspired many Rosaries and at least put the fear of God in a few of his brothers and sisters. I don't know if Patrick confessed this or not, but there is the story of his trying to change his voice in the confessional only for Monsignor Murphy to say at the end, "Pat, would you turn out the lights before you leave," something I have no doubt that he did!

Like many men of his day, Patrick felt the call to serve his country. The Korean War had ended a few years before, but in 1957, at the age of 22, Patrick enlisted and was sent there for two of his three year stint to keep the peace. Being away from all he knew and loved had to have been difficult. It was the beginning of a rough patch for Patrick – his battle with alcohol. Like many Irish, Patrick had a wooden leg and high tolerance for it – but it wasn't what he wanted to define him. It would take him about a decade and marriage to face it down – but he did with great steadfastness. Patrick always accomplished what he set out to do.

Patrick Callahan had a mind for numbers. And for many years he practically ran the R. C. Motor Lines which was headquartered here. I say that because Patrick would work an 80-hour week as their central dispatcher and operations manager – a position he held until a bad merger caused the company to go out of business. Still, Patrick found time for entertainment. He both sang in the Parish Choir and ran a program much like our Tapping Theology both of which a young Mary Graham, a new medical technologist at nearby Baptist Hospital participated in. It was 1962. While Patrick had dated some – the only one who caught his eye was Mary!

Of course, Monsignor Murphy was involved in that, too. Mary wanted to know what he thought of young Patrick and whether she should consider the suggestions of Sylvia Jolly and a few others to go out with him. Monsignor Murphy said it would be ok, because Patrick had “the best parents,” meaning the fruit doesn’t fall far from the tree. Well, as Mary noted, Pat was good looking and sure had a wonderful Ford convertible. It was during one of their first drives that Patrick thankfully stopped at a red light and kissed her – and they never looked back!

There’s was a wedding for the books – on February 13, 1965, Monsignor Murphy celebrated his first Nuptial Mass in English and was assisted not by one but three priests – Monsignor Croghan, Father Kennedy and Father Gorski – enough to make it stick! With Pat constantly at work and having to field calls at all hours, early married life was not easy – and it became all the worse when the company went suddenly out of business causing all its employees to be out of work. By then, Mary was teaching at Midlands Tech – and low and behold, Patrick became one of her students. Mary warned the class of his presence – but Pat soon won them all over becoming more popular than their professor! Patrick would go on to earn four associate degrees and eventually a bachelor’s degree and become a successful medical lab technician until his eventual retirement.

But Pat would never truly retire – at least not here, the place other than his home with Mary he loved the most! Through the end of March, I counted on Pat to run the numbers or least to give me a good count of the prior week’s collection. During one of my last visits to his bedside I told him James Thompson was going to have to step up and be lead counter which seemed to temporarily rouse him – but when that didn’t work, I was certain telling him Joanne Metrick would take over at daily Mass would have the same effect as Jesus saying “stand, take up your mat and walk!” Sadly, it just wasn’t to be.

The day before Pat’s final hospitalization, he and Mary were with us, at Saint Peter’s on Retreat. Mary remembers the beautiful day – the inspiring talks – and how much they enjoyed sitting on a bench in the courtyard holding hands in the sunshine as they reflected on the amazing love of God. It is a memory Mary will always cherish as she did that first kiss in the convertible and their last kiss the day before his passing.

In the Gospel of John proclaimed at this Mass we heard these words:

“Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food and my blood is true

drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me.”

Today we rejoice because Patrick did these things. He remained with his Lord until the end and died, fortified by her Sacraments. Christ and His Church invite us to do the same at this Mass thereby demonstrating our desire to join Patrick with our Lord in paradise. May God inspire us by Patrick’s example to have hearts of steadfast fidelity to Christ all the days of our lives. In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.