

Father Bernard's Funeral
John 12, 23-26
June 10, 2008

In the name of the monastic community, I would like to welcome Bishop Steiner, the family and friends of Father Bernard, and the priests of the archdiocese and religious communities who have joined us for this celebration.

My Brothers and Sisters,

We have gathered here today to offer the Holy Eucharist, the center of our lives, and to include our beloved Father Bernard in the gifts we bring to this altar. The man who gave us so much over his life time, we now return as a gift to God who chose him. Where his coffin lies today on the floor of this Abbey Church is where he lay prostrate under the pall during his solemn profession nearly 70 years ago. It was in that long ago liturgy that Father Bernard confirmed his own baptism through monastic profession and embraced the cross so that he might bear much fruit. During those 70 years, Father Bernard lived as one reborn in Christ, as a servant who followed Jesus and was glorified by Him. Saint Irenaeus, an early theologian, speaking of this glorification of the disciple, says:

This is the glory of man: to persevere and remain in the service of God. For this reason the Lord told his disciples: You did not choose me but I chose you. He meant that his disciples did not glorify him by following him, but in following the Son of God they were glorified by him. As Jesus said: I wish that where I am they also may be.

When I first learned of Father Bernard's death last Monday morning, I spoke to Terry, our CNA who was with him at the time, and learned that he had been reading the Gospel of John to Father just moments before his death. In the Gospel today, taken from chapter 12 of Saint John, we find those powerful words of Jesus telling his disciples that his Hour had come; he was about to suffer, die and then rise again so that we all might be gathered up with him in glory. In the Gospel Jesus goes on to explain that he is the seed which must die in order to bear much fruit, the fruit of salvation and eternal life. At the same time he reveals that this must be our path as well. Out of love, Jesus died for us and out of love he shows us the only way to the Father.

During Father Bernard's seventy years as a monk and 64 years as a priest, he became both the seed that gave life and the good ground in which the Word of God grew: he preached the Word; He welcomed thousands of people with kindness; He listened compassionately for countless hours to the hopes and dreams as well as the personal suffering of others, always offering a calm and faithfilled wisdom. I dare say that most of us gathered here today could recount a litany of the loving care we received from Father at one time or another.

Although he made loving service seem so natural and so easy, it was not always easy for him to persevere, to respond. He, too, suffered personal doubts, ill health, misunderstandings and even opposition to his most cherished commitments and visions. Father Bernard was a faithfilled man who could always imagine a better world in Christ and he worked for it tirelessly and collaborated joyfully with others. He was sometimes thought of as impractical and even foolish in his trust that God would bring about the better world he imagined. When he received the *Lumen Gentium* Award in 1988 from Mount Angel Seminary, he said,

The joys I have had working in the seminary and retreat house far outweigh any efforts I put into them. I have always tried to be guided by the fact that it is God's work and we are all in it together.

In Father Bernard we see so clearly exemplified the disciple following his master. We see a man of faith dying to self so that the Lord of Glory might live in him. Jesus reminds us today in the Word: "Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat." He goes on to say, but when it dies, it produces 30, 60, and even one hundred fold.

My brothers and Sisters:

In those persons who "persevere and remain in God's service", we already experience something of the Kingdom of God and the power of the resurrection among us. Like the face of Moses which glowed after he spoke to God, we see reflected in the faces of these persevering souls the power of God's Love, his Glory. Because God shines through them, we, too, dare to hope for a better world for ourselves and our children. We hope for new life to emerge from tragedy, joy from sorrow, love from hatred, and eternal life from death. We dare to believe that God lives in us and around us; that God loves us.

This is the legacy of faith and goodness that Father Bernard has now bequeathed to you and to me. His work is done. Let us celebrate his life, thank God for him, pray for him, and put into action in our own lives what he so eloquently taught us.

On the occasion of his 50th anniversary of ordination to the priesthood Father Bernard said, and, I believe, he would say to us today:

My Dear Friends:

I am extremely grateful to God for having called me to the priesthood and for staying with me during my strong and weak moments. I tried to carry His Word of love to the people whom I have come to know and love myself.

May Father Bernard rest in peace, and may the Lord bring us all alike to everlasting life!