GOD SHED HIS GRACE ON THEE

Moving Remembrances of 50 American Catholics

COMPILED AND INTRODUCED BY

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Strangers, lovers, friends, neighbors, family,
in the body our oneness is displayed in diversity.

Every aisle a path, every step a sign
of the journey we walk together to the end of time.

—Thomas J. Porter
"We Remember, We Believe"

INTRODUCTION

Sharing memories in order to honor the dead goes back to the beginning of Christianity. Jesus asked us to, “Do this in remembrance of me.” Not in remembrance of dogma, nor a list of thou-shalt-nots, but to remember a person who *pitched his tent among us* (the literal translation of John’s awe-filled words that Christ—*made his dwelling among us*.) So we remember the life of Jesus, commemorate his death, and see him among us now, often “in all his dreadful disguises,” as Mother Teresa put it.

But why do we commemorate lesser mortals? Why do we watch funerals of princesses and pop stars on TV? Why do we gather together and recall the lives of our own recently deceased loved ones?

Perhaps because our sense of who we are is linked to other people, especially to those we have loved and—with Catholics in particular—to those we admire. We cherish stories about the saints, and some of us regularly commune with an even greater “cloud of witnesses” which includes sinners (ordinary folks) as well. We may pray to the heavens, but many of us also “talk” silently with departed spouses, grandparents, and dear friends. Our communion of saints is a bond of love, yearning and consolation encompassing those not (and never to be) canonized.

“Cradle” Catholics are taught from an early age to regularly examine their conscience and to set a good example of behavior for children, as well as for others in a sometimes hostile culture. This lifelong examen can lead to the habit of looking for our own models. It’s no coincidence so many Catholics are bestselling authors of memoir: Frank McCourt, Mary Karr, Tobias Wolff, Mary Gordon, Edward Kennedy, Tony Hendra, Doris Kearnes Goodwin, John Powers. Such writing forms our classic spiritual literature, from Saint

Augustine and all the doctors of the Church down through the ages. Fourteen of the deceased Catholics in this collection wrote memoirs.

Commemorations in this book span the American experience. The earliest subjects, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton and Thaddeus Kościuszko, were born before the Declaration of Independence was signed. This collection includes veterans of major American wars and of peace advocates. The deceased include six who were awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, two recipients of the Congressional Gold Medal, and three inductees into the National Women's Hall of Fame.

Catholic-American ethnic cultures are also reflected here: African, Cajun, Italian, Swiss, Irish, German, Polish, Lebanese, Austrian, Mexican, Cuban, Slovak/Russian, English, French, Scottish, Native American. All of these deceased were fully American, either by birth or naturalization. They include pioneers in social justice, healthcare, and the arts, as well as founders of distinctly American religious orders designed to serve all of the people in the land they had adopted or been born into. "The charity of the good knows no creed and is confined to no one place," said St. Marianne Cope as she tended lepers in the Kingdom of Hawaii in the nineteenth century. As with many in this book, her vision was far ahead of her time. Several of these women were also far ahead of the Church in their time.

Ah yes, the women. Striving for gender balance was my greatest challenge. Women have not been eulogized in American history as men have, not because they haven't made equally significant contributions, but because they have not been equally recognized. This neglect is not only because men wrote our history, but also because of

the humility of these female leaders. "What little good we can do in this world to help and comfort the suffering, we wish to do it quietly and so far as possible unnoticed and unknown," St. Marianne Cope wrote. Indeed, during her life of service, it's possible she was noticed only by the lepers of Molokai'i.

Another self-effacing pioneer, Sister Mary Ignatia (the one cofounder of Alcoholics Anonymous you've never heard of), turned all attention toward her order and the hospital staff whenever anyone tried to thank her for pioneering in-hospital medical treatment for alcoholics. This humility so impressed her two male cofounders that they credited her for inspiring the "Anonymous" aspect of the AA organization.

Catholicism has always provided models of women doing vital work outside the home. The path-forging spirituality of female doctors of the Church have instructed us in faith (Thérèse of Lisieux, Catherine of Siena, and Teresa of Avila); countless other women established orphanages and social programs as part of a lifetime devoted to serving the poor (St. Clare, St. Frances Cabrini, Mother Teresa); even Joan of Arc led on the battlefield. Yet most American Catholics aren't familiar with the work of American women who pioneered hospice; the treatment of cancer and alcoholism; and founded a nationwide educational system, through university, to benefit freed slaves and Native Americans eight decades before the civil rights movement. The names of St. Elizabeth Seton and St. Katharine Drexel may have become better-known since their canonizations in 1975 and 2000, respectively, but their contributions to this country are rarely well-known.

The accomplishments of these women shows them to be rare visionaries. Consider the speaker from a prominent family who made an impassioned plea at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Her opening remarks were to an audience of females who then lacked the right to vote:

> *Oh, woman, the hour has struck when you are to arise and defend your rights, your abilities for competition with men in*

> *intellectual and professional endurance, the hour when you are to prove that purity and generosity are for the nation as well as the home.*

The speaker, Rose Hawthorne Lathrop, daughter of writer Nathaniel Hawthorne, went on to found an order of nuns. Their years of hands-on service to terminally ill cancer patients, with none of the nuns contracting the disease, proved to the medical community that cancer was not contagious.

An extraordinarily high percentage of the women in this book—and every one of those who were single or widowed—didn't begin what was to become their significant life's work until they were approaching or past the average age of death for their time. All were late bloomers who continued to work many more years into advanced old age. This phenomenon has an awe-inspiring consistency.

Consider those born into the nineteenth century: Rose Lathrop, Marianne Cope, Dorothy Day, Katharine Drexel, and Sister Ignatia. In their era, a woman's life expectancy was between 40.5 and 44.5 years. Rose Lathrop was forty-four when she moved to a New York tenement to care for the dying, initiating what became known as hospice; she was forty-nine when she founded her order of nuns. Marianne Cope was forty-five when she answered a call to go to Hawaii to care for lepers. Dorothy Day was about thirty-seven when she began the Catholic Worker Movement, and Katharine Drexel was thirty-three when she simultaneously established her religious order and a vast nationwide school system for minorities. At age thirty-nine, Sister Ignatia, "the angel of Alcoholics Anonymous," began working with the other two cofounders of AA after her twenty-year career as a musician.

Going back to the eighteenth century, the late bloomer is St. Elizabeth Seton. She founded her order at age thirty-five, in colonial America, when the average life expectancy was twenty-five years. Although that average reflects the high death rate of children, colonists who survived to adulthood were stalked by epidemics of smallpox, influenza, tuberculosis, and malaria. "Indian" massacres

also took many lives.

This trend continues into the twenty-first century. Mary K. Meyer began running a settlement house in Kansas at age forty-seven, after a career in business. Elizabeth Christman began her college preparation as a teacher in her fifties; she earned her Ph.D and became an associate professor in her sixties; then she had a long career and died at age ninety-six.

The lesson of these odds-defying, late-blooming women is clear: it is never too late to find your calling, to develop your talents, and to pursue your dream. Women who recreate themselves with a grace-filled spirit can change the face of the earth.

A section in this book is devoted to poems. Elegiac poetry exists in every language, but many more Americans read and wrote poetry in earlier times than we do now. During World War I, Alexander Woollcott visited the grave in France of his New York Times colleague Joyce Kilmer, who had been killed in battle. Woollcott feared the poet Kilmer might have been out of place in his famed "Fighting 69th" Regiment. But that was not the case, as he wrote his editor in 1918:

> *[T]hey all knew his verse. I never got over my surprise at finding that all soldiers read verse and most of them write it. Most of them carry a little notebook in which they set down their own couplets.... I found any number of men who had only to fish about in their tattered blouses to bring out the copy of a poem Kilmer wrote in memory of some of their number who were killed ....*

After the newspaper announced Kilmer's death, it was flooded with poetic tributes written by readers, and many were published. The day has long passed when newspapers publish verse written by readers, but people still write elegies. Perhaps composing a poem

helps make sense of sorrow and honors the deceased when ordinary language seems insufficient. Several of the prose eulogies in this collection also end with a poem, as if the speaker needed help to finish pondering a loved one's life, and decided, appropriately, to let the poet have the last word.

Honored here are fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, spouses, children, teammates, coaches, friends, colleagues, competitors, shipmates, and mentors. Although a handful of the deceased have been canonized, and many were recognized as great leaders, this collection also reminds us that the world is full of unsung people who lived righteously. The lifelong benefits derived from mothers and fathers who raised their children well; from a loving spouse; from a sibling who always had their back; from the teacher who recognized their gift—such people are heroes to those whose lives they have enriched.

Who inspired such people is a very Catholic concern, and these American lives reflect a development of influences over time. Francis of Assisi and Thomas á Kempis were most often cited by those who lived in the late-eighteenth century. Many also mentioned Thérèse Lisieux and Catherine of Siena. European role models gave way to an American role model once Dorothy Day began writing about her Catholic Worker Movement. Day became—and remains—the single most frequently cited inspiration among these American Catholics since the mid-twentieth century.

The Gospel of Matthew was another guiding light. Mary K. Meyer took to heart its mandate to visit the prisoner and feed the hungry in her career as a peace advocate and homeless shelter director. Former Speaker of the House Tip O'Neill considered the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-13) "the greatest political speech ever written." Others cited Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Gandhi as role models, and Robert F. Kennedy influenced lives as diverse as César Chávez and singer Rosemary Clooney.

The oldest *In Memoriam* tributes are offered in the language of their time. I present these pieces without substituting contemporary usage for archaic words, spelling or punctuation. Reflecting their individual creators, tributes appear here as they did then.

When I began compiling these remembrances, I assumed their central message would be some form of "Well done, thy good and faithful servant." But I found they encompass a wider territory. Often, the task is to draw meaning out of an unthinkable loss and to comfort those left behind after the death of a child, or, in one case, a suicide.

These remind us that the world we inhabit differs from televised funerals with celebrity eulogists. Where we live—and die—eulogy is not a performance art: It is a gift, often necessarily an act of self-sacrifice. In everyday life, most people name public speaking as their greatest fear, even above dying. This means, as columnist Peggy Noonan once pointed out, if asked to choose between standing at the lectern and lying in the coffin at a funeral, most people would opt to be the dead body. Speaking at a memorial service about someone we cared for, while also mourning that loss, is a sacrificial act for most of us and not without its accompanying terrors.

All of this brings us back to why we want and even need to do this. The common theme in eulogies suggests an answer: it seems to be "What this Catholic life has taught me." Although only one of the deceased in this collection was a teacher by profession, the inescapable conclusion here is that we are all teachers—like it or not. And that we can be all perpetual students as well, as long as we are paying attention. There is something hopeful in that, and in all the Christian death rituals. The last rites, the wake, the funeral, the Mass cards, the food—and especially shared reminiscences about a loved one—make grief more bearable. They mean that we are not alone: It is in community, at a time of loss, that healing begins.

Unless we've been there and done that, it would seem counter-

intuitive that eulogies so often involve laughter. What makes us smile as we read them usually filled a church with the loud laughter of mourners. Such shared delight in the midst of grief can only occur in community. It affirms the bond of those who loved and lost someone and is deeply reassuring. Solitary grieving cannot accommodate laughter.

The shared memories can also heal, as they broaden or confirm our own experience with the deceased. At a time when memories are all we will have left of someone dear to us, eulogies allow us to add to those memories. This experience can also give us great appreciation for the storyteller. We form as vivid an impression of many of the eulogists in this collection as we do of their subjects.

We also inevitably reflect upon our own life when we do this, wondering how we will be remembered. We review the cycle of life, loss, and the end of suffering, and may consider how it is we want to go on living. Because such tributes are *about* the deceased but *for* the living, they can help us find the strength to go back to our life, and to live it more deliberately.

The dead don't need to be told what their life has meant to us. We who are still here need to tell it and to share it.

Carol DeChant
Sarasota, FL
July 4, 2015

I. WE REMEMBER
Our Heroes

THE HAPPIEST MAN ON EARTH: CHAPLAIN MYCHAL JUDGE, NYFD

by Father Michael Duffy
September 15, 2001
St. Francis of Assisi Church, New York, NY

The first recorded death of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States was that of peace-loving Franciscan Friar Mychal Judge. Chaplain of the New York City Fire Department, Father Judge was killed while ministering to those firefighters who were first on the scene. Ultimately, some four-hundred-and-seventeen firefighters, paramedics, and police officers lost their lives in the Twin Towers.

This eulogy was given just four days later to a city still in shock, before the full extent of the devastation was known.

After all that has been written about Father Mychal Judge in the newspapers, after all that has been spoken about him on television, the compliments, the accolades, the great tribute that was given to him last night at the wake service, I stand in front of you and honestly feel that the homilist at Mother Teresa's funeral had it easier than I do.

We Franciscans have very many traditions. You, who know us, know that some are odd, some are good. I don't know what category this one fills.

One of our traditions is that we're all given a sheet of paper. The title on the top says, "On the Occasion of Your Death." Notice, it doesn't say, "In case you die." We all know that it's not a matter of *if*, it's a matter of *when*. But on that sheet of paper lists categories

that each one of us is to fill out: where we want our funeral celebrated, what readings we'd like, what music we'd like, where we'd like to be buried.

Mychal Judge filled out, next to the word "homilist," my name: Mike Duffy. I didn't know this until Wednesday morning. I was shaken and shocked...for one thing, as you know from this gathering, Mychal Judge knew thousands of people. He seemed to know everybody in the world. And if he didn't then, they know him now, I'm sure. Certainly he had friends that were more intellectual than I, certainly more holy than I, people more well-known. And so I sat with that thought, "Why me?" And I came down to the conclusion that I was simply and solely his friend...and I'm honored to be called that.

I always tell my volunteers in Philadelphia that through life, you're lucky if you have four or five people whom you can truly call a friend. And you can share any thought you have, enjoy their company, be parted and separated, come back together again and pick up right where you left off. They'll forgive your faults and affirm your virtues. Mychal Judge was one of those people for me. And I believe and hope I was for him.

We as a nation have been through a terrible four days, and it doesn't look like it's ending. Pope John Paul called Tuesday a "dark day in the history of humanity." He said it was a terrible affront to human dignity. In our collective emotions, in our collective consciousness, all went through the same thing on Tuesday morning.

I was driving a van in Philadelphia, picking up food for our soup kitchen, when I began to hear the news, one after another after another. You all share that with me. We all felt the same. It was at two o'clock in the afternoon that I came back to the soup kitchen, feeling very heavy with the day's events. At four-thirty, I received a call from Father Ron Pecci. We were serving a meal to the homeless. And he said, "It's happened." I said, "What?" And he said, "Mychal Judge is dead."

At that moment, my already-strained emotions did spiritually what the World Trade towers had done physically just hours before.

And I felt my whole spirit crumble to the ground and turn into a pile of rubble at the bottom of my heart. I sat down on the stairs to the cellar, with the phone still to my ear, and we cried for fifteen minutes.

Later, in my room, a very holy friar whom I have the privilege to live with gently slipped a piece of paper in front of me and whispered, "This was written thousands of years ago in the midst of a national tragedy. It's a quote from the book of Lamentations: 'The favors of the Lord are not exhausted. His mercies are not spent. Every morning, they are renewed. Great is his faithfulness. I will always trust in him.'"

I read that quote and I pondered and listened. I thought of other passages in the Gospel that said evil will not triumph. That in the darkest hour when Jesus lay dying on the cross, that suffering led to the resurrection.

I read and thought that the light is better than darkness, hope better than despair. And in thinking of my faith, and the faith of Mychal Judge, and all he taught me, and from scripture, I began to lift up my head and once again see the stars.

And so today I have the courage to stand in front of you and celebrate Mychal's life. For it is his life that speaks, not his death. It is his courage that he showed on Tuesday that speaks, not my fear. And it is his hope and belief in the goodness of all people that speaks, not my despair. And so I am here to talk about my friend.

Because so much has been written about him, I'm sure you know his history. He was a New Yorker through and through. As you know, he was born in Brooklyn. Some of you may not know this, but he was a twin—Dympna is his sister. He was born May 11, she was born May 13. Even in birth, Mychal had to have a story. He just did nothing normally, no.

He grew up in Brooklyn playing stickball and riding his bike like all the little kids then. Then he put some shoe polish and rags in a bag, rode his bicycle over here, and in front of the Flatiron building shined shoes for extra money. But very early on in his life, when he was a teenager—and this is a little unusual—because of the faith

that his mother and his sisters passed on to him, because of his love for God and Jesus, he thought he would like to be a Franciscan for the rest of his life. And so, as a teenager, he joined the friars. And he never left. He never left because his spirit was truly, purely Franciscan: simple, joyful, life-loving, and laughter. He was ordained in 1961 and spent many years as a parish priest in New Jersey: East Rutherford, Rochelle Park, West Milford. Spent some time at Siena College. One year, I believe, in Boston.

And then he came back to his beloved New York. I came to know him ten years after he was ordained. This is ironic: My thirtieth anniversary of ordination was Tuesday, September 11. This always was a happy day for me, and I think from now, it's going to be mixed.

My first assignment was wonderful: I was sent to East Rutherford, New Jersey, and Mychal was there doing parochial work. In the seminary we learned a lot of theory, but you really have to get out with people to know how to deal and how to really minister. So, I arrived there with my eyes wide open and my ears wide open. And my model turned out to be Mychal Judge. He was, without knowing it, my mentor, and I was his pupil. I watched how he dealt with people. He really was a people person. While the rest of us were running around organizing altar boys and choirs and liturgies and decoration, he was in his office listening. His heart was open. His ears were open, and especially he listened to people with problems.

He carried around with him an appointment book. He had appointments to see people four and five weeks in advance. He would come to the rec room at night at one-thirty, having just finished his last appointment, because when he related to a person, they felt like he was their best friend. When he was talking with you, you were the only person on the face of the earth. And he loved people, and that showed, and that makes all the difference. You can serve people, but unless you love them, it's not really ministry. In fact, a description that St. Bonaventure wrote of St. Francis once, I think, is very apt for Mychal: St. Bonaventure said that St. Francis had a bent for compassion. Certainly Mychal Judge did.

The other thing about Mychal Judge is he loved to be where the action was. If he heard a fire engine or a police car, any news, he'd be off. He loved to be where there was a crisis, so he could insert God in what was going on. That was his way of doing things.

I remember once I came back to the friary and the secretary told me, "There's a hostage situation in Carlstadt, and Mychal Judge is up there." I got in the car and drove there: A man on the second floor with a gun pointed to his wife's head and the baby in her arms. He threatened to kill her. There were several people around, lights, policemen, and a fire truck. And where was Mychal Judge? Up on the ladder in his habit, on the top of the ladder, talking to the man through the window of the second floor. I nearly died, because in one hand he had his habit out like this, because he didn't want to trip.

So, he was hanging on the ladder with one hand. He wasn't very dexterous, anyway. His head was bobbing like, "Well, you know, John, maybe we can work this out. This really isn't the way to do it. Why don't you come downstairs, and we'll have a cup of coffee and talk this thing over?"

I thought, "He's going to fall off the ladder. There's going to be gunplay." Not one ounce of fear did he show. He was telling him, "You know, you're a good man, John. You don't need to do this." I don't know what happened, but he put the gun down, and the wife and the baby's lives were saved. Of course, there were cameras there. Wherever there was a photographer within a mile, you could be sure the lens was pointed at Mychal Judge. In fact, we used to accuse him of paying *The Bergen Record*'s reporter to follow him around.

Another aspect, a lesson that I learned from him, his way of life, is his simplicity. He lived simply. He didn't have many clothes. They were always pressed, of course, and clean, but he didn't have much. No clutter in his very simple room.

He would say to me once in a while, "Michael Duffy"—he always called me by my full name—"Michael Duffy you know what I need?" And I would get excited because it was hard to buy him a present.

I said, "No, what?"

"You know what I really need?"

"No, what Mike?"

"Absolutely nothing. I don't need a thing in the world. I am the happiest man on the face of the earth." And then he would go on for ten minutes, telling me how blessed he felt. "I have beautiful sisters. I have nieces and nephews. I have my health. I'm a Franciscan priest. I love my work. I love my ministry." And he would go on, and always conclude by looking up to heaven and saying, "Why am I so blessed? I don't deserve it. Why am I so blessed?" But that's how he felt all his life.

Another characteristic of Mychal Judge: he loved to bless people, and I mean physically. Even if they didn't ask. A little old lady would come up to him and he'd talk to her, you know, as if she was the only person on the face of the earth. Then he'd say, "Let me give you a blessing." He put his big, thick Irish hands and pressed her head till I thought the poor woman would be crushed, and he'd look up to heaven, and he'd ask God to bless her, give her health and give her peace and so forth.

A young couple would come up to him and say, "We just found out we're going to have a baby."

"Oh, that's wonderful! That's great!" He'd put his hand on the woman's stomach and call to God to bless the unborn child.

When I used to take teenagers on bus trips, he'd jump in the bus, lead the teenagers in prayer, and then bless them all for a safe and a happy time. If a husband and wife were in crisis, he would go up to them, take both their hands at the same time, and put them right next to his and whisper a blessing that the crisis would be over.

He loved to bring Christ to people. He was the bridge between people and God, and he loved to do that. And many times over the past few days, several people have come up and said, "Father Mychal did my wedding. Father Mychal baptized my child. Father Mychal came to us when we were in crisis." There are so many things that Father Mychal Judge did for people. I think there's not one registry in a rectory in this diocese that doesn't have his name in it for something, a baptism, a marriage, or whatever.

But what you may not know, it really was a two-way street. You people think he did so much for you. But you didn't see it from our side, we that lived with him. He would come home and be energized and nourished and thrilled and be full of life because of you.

He would come back and say to me, for instance, "I met this young man today. He's such a good person. He has more faith in his little finger than I do in my own body. Oh, he's such good people. Oh they're so great." Or, "I baptized a baby today." And just to see the new life, he'd be enthused. I want just to let you know, and I think he'd want me to let you know, how much you did for him. You made his life happy. You made him the kind of person that he was for all of us.

It reminds me of that very well-known Picasso sketch of two hands holding a bouquet of flowers. You know the one I mean—there's a small bouquet, it's colorful, and a hand is coming from the left side and another hand is coming from the right side. Both are holding the bouquet. The artist was clever enough to draw the hands in the exact same angle. You don't know who's receiving and who is giving. And it was the same way with Mychal. You should know how much you gave to him, and it was that love that he had for people, and that way of relating to him, that led him back to New York City and to become part of the fire department.

On Tuesday, one of our friars, Brian Carroll, was walking down Sixth Avenue and actually saw the airplane go overhead at a low altitude. And then a little further, he saw smoke coming from one of the Trade towers. He ran into the friary. He ran into Mychal Judge's room. And he said, "Mychal, I think they're going to need you. I think the World Trade tower is on fire." Mychal was in his habit. So, he jumped up, took off his habit, got his uniform on, and I have to say this, in case you really think he's perfect, he did take time to comb and spray his hair.

But just for a second, I'm sure. He ran down the stairs, and he got in his car, and with some firemen, he went to the World Trade towers. While he was down there, one of the first people he met was the mayor, Mayor Giuliani. Later, the mayor recounted how he put

his hand on Mychal's shoulder and said, "Mychal, please pray for us." And Mychal turned and with that big Irish smile said, "I always do."

And then kept on running with the firefighters into the building. While he was ministering to dying firemen, administering the Sacrament of the Sick and Last Rites, Mychal Judge died. The firemen scooped him up to get him out of the rubble and carried him out of the building and wouldn't you know it? There was a photographer there. That picture appeared in *The New York Times*, *The New York Daily News* and *USA Today* on Wednesday, and someone told me last night that *People* magazine has that same picture in it. I bet he planned it that way.

When you step back and see how my friend Mychal died, when we finish grieving, when all this is over and we can put things in perspective, look how that man died. He was right where the action was, where he always wanted to be. He was praying, because in the ritual for anointing, we're always saying, "Jesus come, Jesus forgive, Jesus save." He was talking to God, and he was helping someone. Can you honestly think of a better way to die? I think it was beautiful.

The firemen took his body, and because they respected and loved him so much, they didn't want to leave it in the street. They quickly carried it into a church, and instead of just leaving it in the vestibule, they went up the center aisle. They put the body in front of the altar. They covered it with a sheet. And on the sheet, they placed his stole and his fire badge. And then they knelt down and they thanked God. And then they rushed back to continue their work.

And so, in my mind, I picture Mychal Judge's body in that church, realizing that the firefighters brought him back to the Father in the Father's house. And the words that come to me, "I am the Good Shepherd, and the Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. Greater love than this no man hath than to lay down his life for his friends. And I call you my friends."

So I make this statement to you this morning that Mychal Judge has always been my friend. And now he is also my hero.

Mychal Judge's body was the first one released from Ground Zero. His death certificate has the number one on the top. I meditated

on the fact of the thousands of people that we are going to find out who perished in that terrible holocaust. Why was Mychal Judge number one? And I think I know the reason. Mychal's goal and purpose in life at that time was to bring the firemen to the point of death, so they would be ready to meet their maker. There are between two and three hundred firemen buried there, the commissioner told us last night.

Mychal Judge could not have ministered to them all. It was physically impossible in this life but not in the next. And I think that if he were given his choice, he would prefer to have happened what actually happened. He passed through the other side of life, and now he can continue doing what he wanted to do with all his heart. And the next few weeks, we're going to have names added, name after name, of people who are being brought out of that rubble. And Mychal Judge is going to be on the other side of death to greet them instead of sending them there. And he's going to greet them with that big Irish smile. He's going to take them by the arm and the hand and say, "Welcome, I want to take you to my Father." And so, he can continue doing in death what he couldn't do in life.

And so, this morning we come to bury Mychal Judge's body but not his spirit. We come to bury his mind but not his dreams. We come to bury his voice but not his message. We come to bury his hands but not his good works. We come to bury his heart but not his love.

Never his love.

We his family, friends, and those who loved him, should return the favor that he so often did for us. We have felt his big hands at a blessing. Right now, it would be so appropriate if we called on what the liturgy tells us we are: a royal priesthood and a holy nation. And we give Mychal a blessing as he returns to the Father.

So, please stand. And raise your right hand and extend it towards my friend Mychal and repeat after me.

Mychal, may the Lord bless you. May the angels lead you to your Savior. You are a sign of his presence to us. May the Lord now embrace you and hold you in his love forever. Rest in peace. Amen.

AN AMERICAN ORIGINAL: MOTHER KATHARINE DREXEL

by Anthony Walton
Autumn, 2004

Katharine Drexel's long life spanned twenty American presidencies. She lived through our country's bloodiest wars and Indian massacres, from the Civil War to the year that America sent its first military advisors into Vietnam. Eulogist Anthony Walton, an African-American studies specialist and writer in residence at Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine, rightly sees her as an "American original" who greatly impacted her country, although she transcended its politics and every known style of leadership. He wrote this memorial tribute after she was canonized.

By the time she was twenty-one, Katharine had made her debut into society, refused a marriage proposal, and was writing her former pastor, Bishop James O'Connor, about her vocation. His new diocese included the Northeast Territory, Dakota, and parts of Montana, Missouri, and Wyoming. His letters told of the terrible Custer massacre and of America's betrayal of the Indians.

The order of nuns she founded in 1891, at age thirty-three, added to their pledge of poverty, chastity, and obedience a vow unique in American and Catholic history: "To be the mother and servant of the Indian and Negro races according to the rule of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament; and not to undertake any work which would lead to the neglect or abandonment of the Indian or Colored races." She dedicated her vast fortune and her life to that work.

Katharine's father had set up a trust in order to protect his daughters from fortune hunters. Their fourteen-million dollar inheritance was divided into three equal portions; the daughters were to receive the income. It is impossible to give an exact modern equivalent on such an amount from 1885, the year he died, but it is safe to say that each daughter would

have had an income of more than 100 million in today's dollars. Katharine outlived both of her childless sisters, inherited their income, and gave it all to her work.

And what amazing work it was: establishing a vast charitable empire that built and staffed schools and churches across America, operated by more than five hundred nuns of her order at the time of her death. She served as CEO, COO, and CFO, negotiating with architects, lawyers, contractors, tribes, and community and diocesan officials, while overseeing the education and faith formation of her own expanding congregation of nuns.

She usually built schools in remote bayou, desert, and rural areas, where the need was greatest. She worked in primitive conditions and travelled by horse, stage coach, and train. She survived typhoid with pneumonia, although some of her nuns died from the rigors of such service.

As early as 1903, eleven of her nuns were educated Navajo women, ready to carry on her work. And by showing what African-Americans could do given the opportunity, she influenced many Catholic schools to accept them long before integration was nationally mandated.

She didn't live to see the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act or the U. S. Indian Claims Commission's efforts toward the government's reparation for its wrongs against minorities. But Mother Drexel had begun the task of reparations eighty years before. She and the women who joined her had done much to save America from its great shame.

Any appreciation of Mother Drexel ends with the question: Who was this woman, so far removed from every notion of what a woman of her time could be or do? Two traits offer a clue. The many letters she left behind reveal a witty woman whose lively sense of humor often targeted herself, and one whose friends and associates invariably cited the joy that she radiated and brought to her mission. That joy is said to survive among the sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, the "fruit of the Spirit" described in Scripture as a notable grace in difficult times.

Her eulogist understands that focusing on the astonishing fortune she gave away can be misleading when assessing St. Katharine's service. For she gave something even more valuable to African- and Native-Americans: She gave dignity and hope, and ultimately, she gave herself.

T*he Oxford Dictionary of Saints* describes Katharine Drexel as a "long-lived American lady…often forgotten…who devoted her life and considerable fortune to American Indians and African Americans." Drexel was by turns heroic, complicated, and an absolute U. S. original—a woman who was both saintly in the traditional ways of spiritual and religious conviction, and entirely effective within the legal, social and political realities of her time and place. But she seems virtually anonymous in U. S. history and in the day-to-day experience of the American Catholic Church. This may in fact have been her wish, but she is someone everyone in the United States, not just Catholics, should recognize, admire and understand. Our society has yet to resolve the issues to which she chose to dedicate her life and resources, and there is much to learn from her actions and achievements.

Katharine Drexel was born on November 26, 1858, to Francis and Hannah Langstroth Drexel, members of the extraordinarily wealthy Drexel family of Philadelphia. Francis Drexel and his brother Anthony were globally prominent investment bankers and business partners of Junius and J. P. Morgan, the most powerful financiers of the nineteenth century. The Drexels were involved with the financing of the construction of the railroads, shipping canals and other key components of the U. S. industrial revolution. Katharine was the second daughter and, after the death of her mother when she was five weeks old, was raised by a kind and devout stepmother, Emma Bouvier. The Drexels lived in palatial comfort, at the pinnacle of high society. But they were also known for their extensive charity and philanthropy: The second Mrs. Drexel yearly gave away what today would be more than eleven million dollars, regularly passed out food and clothing to the city's poor directly from the family mansion, and supported many other charities anonymously, activities that had a lasting effect on the values and world-view of her stepdaughter. As a child Katharine secretly gave away money and

was relieved that her father encouraged rather than chastised her when he found out.

At age fourteen, the young heiress considered joining a convent. She was discouraged by her parents, who wanted her to marry and have children, and by her priest and spiritual adviser, Bishop James O'Connor, who believed that a young woman so accustomed to wealth and freedom would have trouble adjusting to convent life. Katharine herself had doubts—enduring trials of spirit which she set forth in a series of eloquent, unsparingly honest journals and letters. Among her reasons for questioning her fitness, she listed, "I hate community life.... I'd hate never to be alone. I do not know how I could bear the privations of poverty of the religious life. I have never been deprived of luxuries."

When Katharine was twenty-one years old, Emma Bouvier Drexel developed cancer, and in the three years before her death endured excruciating pain. Rather than leading Katharine to question her faith, nursing Mrs. Drexel and witnessing the intense physical hardship seems to have deepened it. Katharine became convinced that suffering was an inescapable part of the human condition and decided that any truth which transcended suffering could be found only through devotion to God. Following Emma's death, while on a trip out west with her father, Katharine was profoundly disturbed by the appalling conditions she witnessed on the government's poorly administered Indian reservations. When she inherited money upon her father's death in 1885, she began donating large sums toward bettering the situation of Native Americans. She had become deeply concerned as well with the plight of the recently freed African Americans, particularly in the Deep South.

Through these interests her spiritual calling grew to outweigh her self-doubts. She would write, "I didn't think of becoming a religious until years after I'd become interested in missionary work on the Indian reservations. It was long after I'd helped build schools for Indians and Negroes, and endeavored to get priests and nuns to do the work of religious training in those schools. It suddenly seemed one night that something inside of me was saying, 'Why do you keep

sending other people to do this great work for you? Why don't you do it yourself?'"

In 1891, the same year her uncle Anthony founded the Drexel Institute of Art, Science and Industry (now Drexel University), Katharine Drexel took her final religious vows in an order she founded. She called the order the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament for Indians and Colored People. Though she strongly felt the need for a new order of nuns specifically devoted to African American and Native American populations, she questioned her own fitness for the role of Mother Superior: "The responsibility of such a call almost crushes me," she wrote to Bishop O'Connor, "because I am so infinitely poor in the virtues necessary." However, with O'Connor's encouragement and his faith—after many years of struggle—in the strength of her calling, she agreed to head her new order.

Today we most likely interpret the actions of someone who dedicates herself to the cause of the betterment of racial minorities as a kind of social worker. We might even disparage such a person as naive, motivated by political pieties and the guilt of privilege. Such simplifications fall away in the case of Drexel, who was, first and foremost, a young woman completely immersed in her relationship with God. She wanted to go as far as she could into that relationship (her initial wish as a young adult had been to join a contemplative and cloistered, rather than active, order), and her missionary and social work grew from a desire to share with others what she had found in her spiritual development.

This is a different motivation from that which is commonly seen in our society's pursuit of social concerns. Understanding that difference is crucial when studying her life. In Drexel's view, it was not enough to provide money and material relief. As she understood things, there was to be no peace in life without God, and she believed that the disregarded African and Native American populations could not be fully emancipated and equal members of society until they knew religion—until they had fully experienced for themselves God's love and liberation, just as she had. And to know religion, she reasoned, they had to be *educated*.

Drexel as a revolutionary—but a quiet one. She and her initial group of fifteen nuns founded an Indian school in Santa Fe, New Mexico, in 1893, and founded several others in the years that followed. She faced bitter opposition from within and outside the Catholic church. Inside the church of that time, as Father Joseph Martino—the priest assigned by the Vatican to write the *positio* arguing for her canonization—noted, "Most Catholic priests abhorred working with Blacks because of racial prejudice." Martino summarizes at length a letter written to the Holy See by a Belgian missionary to the American South in the early 1900s, stating that "Black girls were denied admission to convents, and there were also girls who had been expelled from religious communities, even years after, once it was discovered that they were actually Black."

Opposition from the outside was even more intense. The main center for the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament in Bensalem, Pennsylvania, received a bomb threat when it was under construction. One of the buildings of a school in Rock Castle, Virginia, was destroyed by arson in 1899; in Texas, in 1922, the Ku Klux Klan threatened to burn down another of Drexel's schools. Countless similar threats were received and summarily ignored as the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament persisted in their work.

Operating in the segregated South, Mother Katharine never called directly for the overthrow of the Jim Crow legal system. Instead she followed a hard-headed and pragmatic strategy that was probably the only one, in that social era and context, which had a possibility of working: "Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's." Nominally living within the laws of the jurisdictions where they found themselves, the sisters insisted, in the work and practices of the order, on the equal worth of every individual. It was customary in Catholic churches in the South to make blacks stand or sit in roped-off areas at the rear. Following Drexel's orders, the churches connected to the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament offered two rows of pews running from front to back, one for the blacks and one for whites, side by side. This small step in the direction of equality gave segregationist authorities no statutory grounds for closing the

churches down. When confronted with intense resistance in certain locales to the opening of schools for African Americans, the sisters quietly put in practice another of Christ's maxims, "Be as wise as serpents and as gentle as doves." They utilized shell corporations and other legal maneuvering to purchase land anonymously and circumvent opposition.

The simultaneous delicacy of spirit and iron force of will evident in Drexel's life and works are stunning. From its modest beginnings of a small number of schools and missions, the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament were able to train teachers from the disadvantaged groups who then went out to found new schools and teach others. Drexel's insight in setting in motion a process of teachers creating teachers and community leaders in an ever-expanding pool of educated men and women amounts to a kind of genius. It is one of the most long-lasting and solid foundations that has been built in the attempt to provide assistance to African and Native Americans. The order was ultimately responsible for founding one-hundred forty-five missions, twelve schools for Native Americans, and fifty schools for African Americans.

Katharine Drexel, who died in 1955 at age 96, did not wish to be considered for canonization. Canonization requires significant amounts of money for research and documentation, and she, according to *Making Saints* by Kenneth L. Woodward…believed "the money required for the process would be better spent on helping Indians and blacks." Her cause, however, had such enormous support, including from many of those who had been educated at her schools, that the process was set in motion. Canonization requires extensive documentation of miracles performed through prayer to the individual in question; in Drexel's case, two deaf individuals regained their hearing in ways inexplicable to doctors. But by far the great miracle, as Pope John Paul II emphasized in his homily at her canonization Mass in 2000, lay in what she accomplished during her life.

Xavier University in New Orleans stands as perhaps the most notable testament to the force of Katharine Drexel's vision.

Xavier was founded in 1915 through an initial grant of $750,000 from Drexel. The only historically black and Catholic college in the United States, Xavier was—according to nuns of her order—one of the projects closest to Drexel's heart. Xavier began with a small collection of buildings on the grounds of what had previously been a high school; today it has grown to house more than 3,800 students. *The New York Times' Selective Guide to Colleges* describes Xavier as "a school where achievement has been the rule and beating the odds against success a routine occurrence."

Xavier currently places more African Americans into medical schools than any other college in the nation. It awards more degrees than does any other college to African Americans in biology and the life sciences, in the physical sciences, and in physics. Its prominent graduates have included Alvin Boutte, class of 1951, founder and CEO of Indecorp Hotels; Louis Castenall, class of '68, dean of the University of Cincinnati's College of Education, praised by *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* for his innovations in teacher education; and Alexis Herman, class of '69, the first black U. S. secretary of labor. With its stated mission of preparing students "to assume roles of leadership and service in society," Xavier has graduated countless others who have led in smaller but deeply significant ways in their communities, among them physician Regina Benjamin, class of '79, who returned to her home region of Bayou La Batre, Alabama, to found a health clinic dedicated to serving people who lacked the money to afford health care. She financed the clinic herself for over a decade by moonlighting in the ERs of local hospitals.

Drexel's emphasis on the central importance of equal education holds key lessons for a society that was—as Pope John Paul II stated at her canonization Mass—still torn apart in many ways by issues of race. The ripple effects of Drexel's work can never precisely be measured or calculated, but it is hard to imagine that even she could have predicted these effects. Then again, given the central mystery of a life of faith in any age, particularly ours, perhaps it is not so hard. She once wrote of her mission, "I looked up in wonder at God's wonderful ways and thought, 'How little we imagine what may be

the result of listening and acting on a desire He puts into the heart. He will bless it, if we try to act upon it.'"

She made one request at Xavier University's dedication ceremony: that her own name not be mentioned. She watched, unmentioned and unremarked, from a seat at the back of the auditorium.