

Michael Beausang's Memorial Service 6/25/2011

I am the Rev. Ronald W. Parker, (Rector Emeritus) and I am here at the request of the family and rector, The Rev. Kevin J. Moroney, who is in Ireland 3,000 plus miles away. Who expresses his great sympathy for not being able to be present.

The loss of Michael to this parish cannot be overly expressed, since Mike had been our legal consultant, our Accounting Warden, buildings and grounds supervisor, and our compulsive door painter. More than that, he was a dear friend to all who knew him. He has been, and even though he is gone from us physically, he has been a gift.

You might have wondered at the unusual processional hymn, "Michael Row The Boat Ashore," but there is a history and a symbolism that the family and I thought revelatory. Forget the folk song we all sung as children, this originally was a slave song sung by abandoned former slaves freed but put on a small island in the 1800's, and the symbolism is interesting.

First thing to know is that the Michael they were singing to was the Archangel Michael. It was believed by the slaves that it was Michael who escorted people across the Jordan River to the Promised Land. The River Jordan symbolized the journey between life and death. And it was dark and cold but those on the other side were there to greet you. And the original words had the person taking the journey, finally meeting his mother on the other side.

Reminds me of Elizabeth Kubler Ross's book, wherein people who were resuscitated remembered during death being greeted by loved ones. The hymn

went, "Jordan's river is deep and wide, Halleluiah, meet my mother on the other side, Halleluiah."

Michael loved the water and he sailed for the last time across the Jordan of the song and is now on the other side and he is in Paradise.

I have to admit when I came here from a parish in New Jersey made up of tradesmen and quite a few unemployed, I was a little intimidated by the professional types on the Main Line, doctors and lawyers.

That didn't last long when the then "Accounting Warden" Mike invited me to lunch. He drove up in an ancient, smoky diesel Mercedes Benz sounding like it was powered by gremlins, upholstered in Golden Labrador and carpeted with oriental prayer rugs. I didn't know whether to sit or kneel.

That's when I knew I had been called to the right church. This man was about as comfortable as could be. What I thought was funny was that I think Michael thought he could do anything as long as he took his time, and he did.

You now sit in pews refinished by Mike and with book holders designed by Mike. He made things for me that I invented, such as the central fitting for the altar rail.

He, as I said, painted those doors you came through at least 17 times in the 17 years I was here. As a matter of fact it might have been 36 times. He gave most of us a heart attack as he teetered on top of a shaky ladder.

He helped many people in this church with advice both legal and otherwise and he did pro bono. He reunited a grandmother with a grandchild. He was the antithesis of every lawyer joke I have ever heard.

I never heard a cross word from him or heard him say anything negative about any other person.

The only words that rang through my head when I heard he had died were the words of Horatio to Hamlet, “Good night, sweet prince, and may flights of angels sing thee to thy rest.”