



Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe November 20, 2016 C

.. Thank you for your prayers!

.. Famous Last Words

For the past three weeks, I have been ‘under the weather’ or ‘out of commission.’ After a multitude of tests, the doctors still are not sure what caused my collapse in church three weeks ago. It may be connected with my blood pressure. But my blood pressure numbers have been good. I thank all of you for your prayers, Masses, concern and love. I am very fortunate to belong to such a loving, praying and caring church family.

Famous Last Words

Today’s Gospel features the last words of the soldiers, bystanders at Calvary, the good repentant thief, and of course, Jesus.

Reflecting on famous last words, Patricia Sanchez writes:

Having made an impression, either for better or for worse, upon the great saga of human history, the last words of certain notables among us have been recorded and preserved. More frequently than not, the manner in which these individuals faced and expressed themselves in death was reflective of the attitude and posture that had characterized them in life. For example, when she lay dying, Queen Elizabeth I of England (1533-1603) was said to have wished, “All my possessions for a moment of time.” Charles IX, who in 1572 had ordered the St. Bartholomew’s Day massacre of the Huguenots throughout France, met death with despair, “What blood! What murders! I am lost forever. I know it.” Philip III of Spain (1578-1621) who proved himself to be an unfit king and indifferent to the plight of his people breathed his last wishing, “Would to God that I had never reigned. What does all my glory profit but that I have so much the more torment in my death?” French statesman and successor to Richelieu, Cardinal Mazarin (d. 1661) had acquired such an extensive art collection that he dreaded being eternally separated from it. Just prior to his death, he dragged himself from room to room of his opulent palace, taking a last lingering look at his treasures. “All these must be left behind,” he moaned. “What trouble I have had to obtain

these things and I shall never see them again! Where am I going?” When Emperor Napoleon III (1808-1873) lay dying, his only thoughts were of a lost battle. “Etiezvous a Sedan?” Where you at Sedan? He inquired. It was the battle of Sedan that had cost him his crown and left him filled with regret at his death.

Similarly regretful, Talleyrand (1754-1838), the French cleric and statesman who helped to depose Napoleon, greeted death with these words, “Behold eighty-three years passed away. . . And all without other results except fatigue of mind and body and a profound sentiment of discouragement as to the future and disgust as to the past.” Nearer to our times, the death of Josef Stalin (1879-1953) was described by his daughter as difficult and terrible. Silenced by a stroke shortly before he died, Stalin’s “last words” were more visual than audible. Newsweek magazine quoted Svetlana Stalin who said, “At what seemed the very last moment, he cast a glance, insane, angry and full of fear of death. With one final menacing gesture, he lifted his left hand as if he were bringing down a curse on us all.”

Jesus’ Last Words

In stark and welcome contrast to the dying words of these political and/or royal rulers, today’s Lucan gospel invites the gathered assembly to consider the last words of Jesus, the Christ and our true king. Whereas the above mentioned worldly sovereigns dreaded death and cursed both the people and the circumstances surrounding their demise, Jesus died as he had lived. With a trust in God that overcame his fear, he accepted death and offered the ignominy of the mockery, the torture and the abandonment for the sins of us all. Foregoing anger and revenge, he asked that his persecutors be forgiven. With a freedom that could only be borne of authentic love, he willingly commended his spirit to God.

He had lived his life true to his ancestral heritage; a shepherd-king like his forefather, David (first reading, 2 Samuel), Jesus exercised his sovereignty in service. He sought out the lost, healed the sick, and lovingly tended to all who were entrusted to his care. Through his death, he rescued a sinful world from the darkness of sin; victoriously enthroned on the cross, he manifested his power and authority by promising paradise to a repentant criminal.

Jesus' regal accomplishments are celebrated in the hymn from Colossians that comprises today's second reading. Through his famous last words of forgiveness, love, healing and promise, he has made peace, reconciling everything and everyone to God.

Puente Asención

In the past year a part of our tithing money (over \$100,000 each year) was used to fund the construction of a bridge in our Sister Diocese in the Dominican Republic. The following is an account of this event recently published in the Florida Catholic.

In the six villages that comprise the sister diocese of San Juan de la Maguana in the Dominican Republic, family has a wide definition.

Parents, grandparents, children, neighbors, and friends all make up a large family, united by their faith and relying on one another in difficult living conditions. Missioners and visitors are also warmly welcomed and immediately drawn into the family. That is what a group from the diocese, who included Bishop John Noonan, Henry Fortier, superintendent of Catholic schools, Kevin Casey, chief financial officer and 15 Catholic school teachers, recently discovered.

"We see them as brothers and sisters in Christ," said Bishop Noonan who confirmed 36 youth and blessed a bridge that had been a year in the making during the visit from Oct. 17-21.

The village of La Cueva is bordered by a river, which becomes impassable when the water is high. Seeing the need to connect the village to its neighbor, La Cucarita, Ascension Parish in Melbourne raised the funds necessary to build a bridge between the two communities. Missioners from the parish and around the diocese worked side-by-side with people of La Cueva and all six neighboring villages to pour cement by hand to form the 24-foot high pillars that support the bridge and link the two communities.

Puente Asención (Ascension Bridge) was inaugurated and blessed by Bishop Noonan Oct. 18. As many areas have no roads and people ride mules for transportation, the bridge will be essential to joining the communities so they can help one another. Father Fred Ruse, who served in the Sister Diocese for many years, said everyone gained a lot from the communal effort to build the bridge.

"Everyone agreed that we had learned from each other to 'be' a bridge," he said.

Following its dedication, Bishop Noonan confirmed 36 candidates from the communities, including nine high school youth from the diocesan residence in Azua who came up the day before to celebrate the events.

Bishop Noonan was moved by the students he met and their outgoing personalities. He recalled one teen who made a point of thanking the bishop for confirming him and called his faith, "the best gift of his life." Bishop Noonan noted, "The young people are advancing well in our schools. I see the communities coming together more and sharing more."

Throughout the week, 15 teachers from six different schools in the Diocese of Orlando led workshops to train an estimated 75 instructors from the four schools in the sister diocese. Directors of State from the Dominican Republic were so impressed with the diocesan students they have asked to send their own teachers for training next year.



Getting the construction materials and heavy equipment up the hill was a major challenge and cost.



Bishop Noonan passing out cookies at the celebration.



In the middle wearing a hat is Fr. Fred Ruse, an Orlando priest who spent 9 years in the hills serving the six communities.

Have a blessed week,

Fr. Ruse