

EULOGY FOR BRO. DOMINIC BERARDELLI

Good morning. On behalf of Brother Dominic's family and his last community here at Mont La Salle, you are all very welcome at this celebration.

Often, after a Brother dies, the Director of his community will select someone to do the eulogy, or he may do it himself. Brother Kenneth, Dominic's Director, informed me that, shortly before he died, Dominic *ordered* him that I was do the eulogy. As in life, so in death, Dominic still gets his way! A Brother told me yesterday, "You get the last word." I say, "Don't bet on it!"

After a long and full life, a famous man wrote in his will: "At my funeral I'd like there to be a *piñata* so people can be happy. But filled with bees so they're not too happy!" I'll do my best to break that *piñata* – *and* – let out some bees!

Since we're here to "celebrate" Dominic, let me begin with the words of a noted comedian: "According to most studies, people's number one fear is public speaking. Number two is death. Death is number two! Does that sound right? This means to the average person, that if you go to a funeral, you're better off in the casket than doing the eulogy!" (Seinfeld)

So, I ran into God the other day and he wasn't very happy. As a matter of fact, it was all I could do to cheer him up. After a good amount of coaxing, I finally got him to open up. Here's the problem: now that Dominic has arrived at the heavenly banquet, he wants to change the menu! Do I need to say any more? Here goes:

- The Pearly Gates have been closed temporarily for cleaning and restoration. The detour sign now reads: "All are welcome!"
- All harps have been sent in for re-tuning.
- Halos have been brightened.
- Seating assignments have been re-arranged.
- God originally created nine choirs of angels – there are now five!
- The Guardian Angels? It's now Dominic who gives them their assignments!
- The constellations have been adjusted and many of them renamed.
- He would have taken St. Peter's keys but Peter hid them!
- Several useless planets have been put away in the heavenly closet.
- Even the cushion on God's throne has been sent out for re-stuffing!

God laughed when he told me that Dominic even tried to edit his pages in the Book of Judgment, but it wouldn't open! He laughed even harder when he told me, "You know, Michael, I'm supposed to be omniscient. But there were times when I had to consult with him just to find out what was going on."

Is God out of a job – or is he now working for Dominic?

In spite of the fact that we're here to celebrate the life – and the new life – of Dominic, we naturally feel sadness at his parting from us because he touched the lives of everyone here in so many ways. But in St. John's Gospel, Jesus tells his disciples: "Your grief will be turned into joy." This is not a replacement, it's a transformation. (Lopez) In the same way, a while ago, in the Preface to the Eucharistic Prayer, we heard the words: "Lord, for your faithful people, life is not ended but merely changed." For me, this sentence highlights the significance of the resurrection. Grief gives way to joy and death is not the end of life. How could it be if we believe in a loving God?

If we believe that Jesus is God in human form, then let's take him at his word: "I am the resurrection and the life. No one who lives and believes in me will die." This was certainly Dominic's faith. Everything he did was energized by this. And if he was anything *he was energetic*. Writing his now-famous statement, the first-century bishop, St. Irenaeus, could have had Dominic in mind, telling us, "God's glory is the human person fully alive." That was Dominic!

At the same time, in the midst of all the liveliness and energy that characterized Dominic, I can't help but think of St. Augustine who, in a private moment prayed to God: "You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You." Having shared many private moments with Dominic over the years, I can attest to his own restlessness which, in his case, I think, was another way to talk about the presence of God – which we Brothers remind ourselves of as often as often as possible. Living in this divine presence brought Dominic face to face with an energy greater than his own. And as much as he nourished himself on that energy and delighted in it, in the end it simply wore him out! And that's not a bad thing. He was ready to go home.

I say this with some trepidation, but Dominic might have liked the idea of being compared to Moses.

- Hearing the voice at the burning bush say: "Take off your shoes. The ground on which you stand is holy," Moses simply did as he was told. Dominic, on the other hand, might have replied, "Says who!"
- Moses wanted to see God's face, but God said: "No one looks upon me and lives!" Dominic would have responded, "I'll take my chances!"
- Moses was told by God that anyone who dared touch the Ark of the Covenant would be struck dead. Much to God's chagrin, Dominic seemed to have an exemption from this because he was always fussing with it! Lightning bolts didn't bother him!
- Ohhh....and did he love to fuss with the Chapel at the College! At times, it's a wonder God didn't simply move out!

I like to think this kind of flippancy is the evidence of a wonderful personal relationship that doesn't rest on formalities. We do this with our friends – why shouldn't we do it with God? Let's face it: Dominic was God's pest and God loved it!

As the devout and pious son of equally devout southern Italians, Dominic's

devotion also focused on others. As a Brother, his devotion focused on students first – he was generous with them to a fault – but a wide-ranging circle of others were also the beneficiaries of his personal and generous attention – and this is what endeared him to so many. He was a Brother’s Brother and everyone knew it!

I’m not going to pass through all the areas of Dominic’s ministry – his tour of duty does that wonderfully. But if you look at all the places he worked in the world, all the positions he held, and all the service he rendered to so many, you can see the Brothers’ handprint he left there, and you can see more evidence of his energy, his devotion, and his certainty that if he grabbed on to God, he – and those of us who knew him, would be in for the ride of our life!

As I said a moment ago, in the end it killed him – but what a way to go. He died from having lived! And despite the fact that he’s storming heaven with a good shake-down, this is what he prepared for all his life.

But lest this becomes too respectful, Dominic liked a good laugh and most of the time he set himself up for it – certainly among us Brothers.

- If you were to take a visual tour through the College’s print media and our website – say – over the last 15 years, you might not know that there are 20 of us Brothers who live and work there. But you rarely see photos of us. It’s not because we’re shy and retiring. No...as one Brother quipped: “The most dangerous place on campus is between Dominic and a camera!”
- Did you know that there are more pictures of Dominic at St. Mary’s than the lady the College is named for? Right now, at least, she has more statues!
- If you got a ride in his “Bromobile” you were among the most privileged.

In or out of that golf cart he was everywhere. But he was also our greatest ambassador. In so many ways he was the face of Saint Mary’s College.

- His favorite day of the year was NOT Christmas or Easter or even his birthday (which was just last week). It was Freshman move-in day in late August!
- Like a father-mother-aunt-or uncle all in one, there he was helping families unload their cars, showing wide-eyed new students where to go, passing out both advice and smiles.
- Then later that day there was the moment of great drama – almost an opera: At the end of the welcome BBQ, Dominic would go off and ring the great bell – the real “Bell of Saint Mary’s.” This was the signal that it was time for all the parents to leave their babies with us and go home! But it gets better....
- Moments later, who was standing in the street in front of the College – in his robe, of course – waving a white handkerchief as cars filled with weeping parents streamed down the road, each one getting a personal farewell from Dominic. You’d think they all came to see him! I’m not making this up – go ask other people.
- There wasn’t a thing at the College he wasn’t into! One Brother noted the other day,

that if Dominic had been at the Last Supper, he would have taken charge of the seating!

- And this is sheer devilment, but during one of his comas in the hospital, he delighted two of us who, during our visits, would try to revive him by sassing him with the most terrible things! Eventually, his doctors took credit for waking him up. But it was really us! Later, when we confessed, he laughed and told us he heard every word!
- Of course, one of the more distinguishing traits about Dominic was that he had no opinions. Well, that's not quite accurate. He had one opinion, and there were no others!
- You're all familiar with the wildly successful series of *Star Wars* movies and its most recent iteration in *The Last Jedi*. You're also familiar with the ominous warning, "There is a disturbance in the force." As far as Dominic was concerned, *he* was the force! The jury is still out on that! Some of us had a different view: he wasn't the force, he was the *disturbance*!
- And you know that Dominic passed away just five minutes into December 28th. In the Church this is the Feast of the *Holy.....Innocents*. You know very well that he waited just long enough!

Well, with all of this and so much more, he did what one inspirational writer suggested: "Carve your name on hearts, not tombstones. A legacy is etched into the minds of others and the stories they share about you." (S.L. Adler) And that's how we celebrate you, Dominic – Brother Dom, as so many called you...a legacy etched in our hearts and our stories.

In his Second Letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul writes, "the love of Christ *impels* us." That was Dominic's motto. Later in the same Letter, St. Paul tells his Corinthian converts: "We are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us." This statement has a deep significance for us Brothers because our Founder, St. John Baptist De La Salle, made it clear that this was exactly our role among our students – being ambassadors for Jesus. More than three hundred years later this mission extends not only to our students but to all who teach and work with us, and all who support our work.

Dominic was right at home with this mission. In the end, his life made sense because he called himself a Brother. A British poet wrote, "Earth's crammed with heaven." (Browning) "Crammed" gives the sense of dense and overflowing – yes! And Dominic went about setting it all in order.

The prophet Isaiah wrote: "Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I. Send me!'" And that was Dominic, too. In his New Testament Letter, St. James writes, "Be doers of the word, not just hearers who deceive themselves." I think he had people like Dominic in mind. He was always a man who wanted to do things. In the Gospel, Jesus said, "I am the way." And Dominic was not afraid to tell Jesus, "Yes, but I've got a better way!"

In the midst of all this, however, it's important to note that Dominic was actually a

man of simple tastes. He was a faithful Brother and certainly brought a bright spark to our Community – some might say high voltage! He was devoted to his friends and he treated his family members like royalty. Teaching in the Philippines for years, he cherished his network of Filipino Brothers, students, and friends. It was fun to tease him that he was Imelda Marcos’ “pet Brother,” and then get him to tell stories about his visits to the palace.

Working at De La Salle North Catholic High School in Portland was a highlight in his later life, and became another cherished aspect of his ministry. You could feel his deep affection for the students and staff there when he talked about them, and those graduates from Portland who came to Moraga were *his “kids.”*

Dominic lived our mission to the max...and it finally did him in. He simply didn’t understand the word “Stop” or the idea of letting go. Frankly, I’m not sure I’ve ever lived with a man who was so driven! At times, stubborn as a mule, in the last several years it was very hard for him to slow down. Many times we wrangled about this and just as many times he managed to fly under my radar until his failing health would speak louder than me.

Moving here to Mont La Salle, where the staff are so wonderfully caring, was the right thing for him, and he deeply appreciated how kindly they treated him in spite of his frustration at being away from Moraga. But let me tell you confidentially..... because I can trust you: secret plans were well under way to set up a command center here from which he could continue to run the College!

Toward the end of his *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, St. John Baptist De La Salle, asks us Brothers to consider – after a lifetime of work – what reward might come our way for our fidelity to our ministry. Unfortunately, it’s not a vacation! Instead, he tells us: “God will give you a more extended ministry and a greater ability to carry it out.” Just what we need – more work! But this is what Dominic lived for. His body may have been sending him other messages, but in his soul, he loved his work, and that’s the voice he heeded the most.

At the very end of these same *Meditations*, De La Salle asks the Brothers to consider another set of rewards – those we might expect in Heaven when our lives here are completed. He paints a wonderful set of images for us, and perhaps the most touching image is that of our students escorting us to Jesus and praising us to him for all that we’ve done for them. The Founder ends by saying:

“Oh! what joy a Brother of the Christian Schools will have when he sees a great number of his students in possession of eternal happiness, for which they are indebted to him by the grace of Jesus Christ! What a sharing of joy there will be between the teacher and his disciples! What a special union with one another there will be in the presence of God!”

So, let me end with a poem.

When I look up at Heaven,
I see the souls of those who died beaming down at me,
Wanting to scream: "I'm still alive!",
Wishing to scribble across the sapphire sky –
Letters to their loved ones.

But a million dark oceans stand between us,
Between those who passed and the living,
Between those of us still here below,
And those who have crossed over the threshold of time –
Where what seems like eternity to us,
Is really only a few minutes to them.

So you see, there is no reason to weep over the shining ones –
For even though the space that separates us is limitless,
The wall of time that divides us is only paper-thin.

And one day, we shall all reunite with them,
When our souls are released like fish
Back into the vast shimmering sea
To shine together like glittering diamonds. (Suzy Kassem)