

Brother Joseph Wasielewski, SM

November 15, 1917 - May 31, 2008

There were two funeral masses for Brother Joseph T. Wasielewski, SM, the first in Cupertino on June 5 and the second, followed by burial, in San Antonio on June 10. The Cupertino Marianist Community also had a remembrance of Brother Joe on June 4. Following are notes from the Cupertino remembrance and the Mass of Christian Burial in San Antonio.

Evening Prayer of Remembrance

Our custom in Cupertino is to have an evening prayer to remember a fellow Brother who died, thanking God for all that God did for him – and through him for others. During this prayer, everyone is invited to share reflections. These are some notes I recorded as we spoke about Brother Joseph Wasielewski, SM, on June 4, 2008 – the 60th anniversary of the foundation of the Marianist Province of the Pacific.

This afternoon we remember Brother Joe Wasy who died on the feast of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Saturday May 31 in his 91st year and the 71st year of his life as a Marianist.

He was the first Marianist to die here at the Marianist Center. As a lifelong member of the Marianist Province of the Pacific, it is a special grace that we are able to have this evening prayer of remembrance on the 60th anniversary of the foundation of the Province.

Brother Frank Spaeth remembers driving Brother Joe to a chiropractor in Honolulu three times a week to find relief for severe back pain. He made some progress and his visits to the doctor became less frequent, but he had a major setback on a trip to the mainland several years ago and was never the same after that. Brother John Haster recalled Brother Joe's legendary appetite and his delight in a snack of cookies and milk (often at 2 a.m.!) Brother John also told us about the time when he began to cry as he looked at the TV monitor of a closed circuit view of the chapel and wondered whether he was already in heaven! Finally, Brother John commented that he may have been the last to talk with Brother Joe before he died – and when the nurse asked him whether he knew who that was, he answered emphatically, “of course I know, that's the boss!”

Brother Pat McMahon shared some recollections of Yokohama – how Brother Joe knew all the parents of his students and was an exceptional teacher of English grammar in the

International School where he worked for so many years – and was so well liked and greatly appreciated because he had such a personal care and concern for his students. At that time in his life he was a red head! And Father John Bolin was commissioned to bring him a supply of “Just for Men” in his visits to Yokohama. Father John Bolin emphasized his dual gifts of humanness and spirituality and several others reinforced this observation. In retirement he became quite adept at communicating with many via e-mail. Father Jim Imhof made several interesting observations because he was with Brother Joe at the beginning (in Beacon, New York) and at the end of his life (in Cupertino) as a Marianist.

Father Jim revealed Brother Joe’s simple but profound devotion in preparing to receive Holy Communion when confined to his room. Many emphasized what I consider his most characteristic virtue: his gratitude for the least service and attentiveness. In his autobiography published last year for his 70th jubilee, Brother Joe expressed his appreciation for his novice master, the legendary Father George Meyer as well as for two other Marianists who inspired him as in the classroom: Brothers Joseph Buettner and Charles McGonagle. Brother John Samaha reminded us that it was Brother (“Bish”) McGonagle who gave Brother Joe the name “Wasy” which a few years ago - after a lifetime of quiet acceptance - he asked not to be used any longer. Some adjectives noted about Brother Joe: simple, jolly, affable, delightful, pleasant, patient and always grateful. In recording his interview with Brother Joe many years ago, Brother Richard Britton concluded with the comment about Brother Joe’s skill with a harmonica.

Our evening prayer is a prayer of thanksgiving
for all that God did for our Brother Joe during his long life –
and for all the good that God did for others
through Brother Joe’s devotedness, especially as a Marianist.

Marianist Residence, San Antonio
Tuesday, June 10, 2008

On behalf of our Provincial Council based in Saint Louis and the Cupertino Marianist Community in California, all of whom are with us in spirit this afternoon, I am deeply grateful to the Marianists in San Antonio for welcoming Brother Joseph Wasielewski for burial with his fellow Marianists here at St. Mary’s near to his sister Agnes and nieces Cathy and Cecilia.

Our celebration this afternoon is truly a celebration of our Marianist family spirit. We are remembering a fellow Brother who served the Church as a Marianist for more than seventy years.

All of us are here to thank God for all that God did for Brother Joseph during his long life and to thank God for all that God did for others through Brother Joseph's devotedness as a Marianist educator from coast to coast – but especially in Hawaii and in Japan. It was a special grace that after a long illness which he endured patiently and quietly, he died on the feast of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, on May 31. Brother Joseph Wasiewleski was truly an international Marianist, having spent nearly forty years of his active life in Yokohama where he is still fondly remembered for his devotedness and charm.

He is also one of the great Ancestors of Courage of the former Marianist Province of the Pacific, having taught in Honolulu and eventually lived out his last years in Cupertino.

In calling Brother Joe to Himself, God has called us together to celebrate this great act of hope. We place our complete confidence in the words of Jesus: *"I am the Resurrection. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live."* We are gathered here this afternoon to proclaim our belief that by death, life is changed, not taken away.

This is our great hope. I find it heartening to realize that so many in our worldwide Marianist Family are united with us this afternoon in the celebration of the eucharist which transcends time and space. Now, in union with all those who are with us in thought and prayer and love, let us pray...

Almighty and gracious God, you who are compassion and love,
grant to Brother Joe the grace to experience the resurrection for which we all hope.
And grant to all of us the grace to find strength in our faith
as we pray confidently for Joe's entrance into eternal life.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

At the funeral mass in Cupertino last week, we used several symbols to celebrate the memory of Brother Joseph Wasielewski, popularly known to us as Brother Joe. There were the standard symbols common to all Marianists: a crucifix, a rosary and a copy of our Rule of Life. To these we added a map of Japan, a basketball jersey, and a textbook to remind us of certain features of Brother Joe's life. The evening before the funeral our community gathered to thank God for giving Brother Joe life and faith and calling him to the Society of Mary.

He was the first Marianist to die in the new Marianist Center in Cupertino. June 4 was also the 60th anniversary of the foundation of the Marianist Province of the Pacific. During our prayer we shared reflections of how Brother Joe had impacted our lives. I incorporated some of those remembrances into my reflections on the readings selected for the funeral Mass.

I had selected a passage from the Book of the prophet Isaiah foretelling a great banquet and a glimpse of eternal life. Perhaps the most significant comment on Brother Joe's life was one of admiration for his remarkable balance of humanness and spirituality. He enjoyed life – he enjoyed sports and coaching – he enjoyed teaching - he enjoyed music - he enjoyed food and drink. Just before his death, when the nurse caring for him asked him whether he wanted anything else, he mumbled what sounded like “cherries!” She wasn't sure she understood so she asked again and Brother Joe patiently spelled out “C-H-E-R-R-Y!” Later Grace, our Director of Nursing, told me that at an earlier period when Brother Joseph was able to go out, he invariably asked for “Cherries Jubilee!”

But what I find especially striking in our first reading is the glimpse of life after death given us by the prophet Isaiah. It was obviously with this hope that Brother Joe patiently endured his long and final illness. Although weakened and under hospice care, he was remarkably alert until the very end of his life. He knew where he was and where he was going.

One morning some time ago he told me, with a sly smile, “I was supposed to die last night!” I thought of that when Brother John Haster, the Director of the Marianist Center, told us of the time Brother Joe awoke from sleep, saw a picture of our chapel on our closed circuit TV channel and thought he was already in heaven!

For me the reading from Paul's letter to the Romans is a masterful act of faith in eternal life. *If, then, we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him.* We hear Paul telling us that just as Christ was raised from the dead we, too, are called to live a new life. This is a very important passage for it focuses our attention on the present as well as on the future. Believing in the resurrection has a practical implication for our everyday life.

All of us were baptized into Christ Jesus, into his passion, death, resurrection. All of us share in the Paschal mystery. There is no doubt that it was his simple but great faith

that sustained Brother Joe during his years of intense activity as an educator – as well as his contemplative years of retirement. Brother Joe’s sharing in the passion in these latter years was his gradual inability to read, to write, to converse.

Finally, the passage from John’s gospel certainly inspires all of us to look forward with hope, with the confidence that Jesus has gone before us to prepare a place for us. All we have to do as we journey through life is to center our attention on Jesus who is indeed the way, the truth and the life. Brother Joe must have remembered over and over again those wonderfully encouraging words of Jesus: *"Don't let your hearts be troubled - trust me!"*

And in recent months Brother Joe must have often remembered the reassuring words of Jesus: *"I am going now to prepare a place for you!"* Jesus said these words at the Last Supper. At this last meal with his friends, Jesus encouraged his friends and prepared them for his departure by promising them they would be together again....All farewells are wrenching – if they weren’t there would be reason to worry! It was especially hard for Brother Joe to leave Yokohama. But all farewells – even the farewell we call death – also express hope for the future: *"till we meet again..."*

Finally, at the cemetery:

We now come to the final farewell.

But it is not the final act in Brother Joe’s life, or in ours.

For Brother Joe, this day of death and burial

is the first day of the rest of his life:

life is changed, not ended, by death.

We thank God for Brother Joseph Wasielewski,

for his great joy in life and in making life joyful for others.

As we look back with gratitude

we also look forward with hope

- hope that because Brother Joe believed in Christ

he will live forever; hope that as we believe in Christ,

we, too, will share in the resurrection.

In that spirit, let us pray the first Glorious Mystery...