

Funeral Homily
Delivered by Deacon Walt Hucke
at the Funeral celebration of
Father Charles Bowes
January 11, 2008

I'd like to thank everyone for being here today. We all need each other's support. To Fr. Charlie's brothers Pat & Steve and the rest of his family - know that we are keeping you in our prayers.

I had the privilege to speak with Fr. Charlie about why he chose these passages of scripture. His response, always to the point, can be summed up in a few words; faith, hope, love, and forgiveness... all brought to life by the graciousness of God's forgiveness.

Through the years Fr. Charlie's choice of words and their elegance grew on many of us. His homilies and teachings, which "just happened" at meetings and gatherings, have left a lasting impression on those he shepherded. His life was lived fulfilling the words he shared with us.

Words and actions are the essence of a person's existence. Words and actions are how we communicate, remember our history, express our love and start wars.

Words change lives forever: "I will love and honor you all the days of my life." "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." And..."You have cancer."

We originally placed a beautiful quote from one of Fr. Charlie's homilies on the inside cover of the program, but we were asked to replace it with one from scripture; he said "No one can improve on what Christ said or how He said it."

Fr. Charlie also asked that a change be made on the cover page. We had chosen the words "To celebrate the life of Fr. Charlie Bowes." He insisted that we replace that with the single word FOR. His reason for this change was simple yet profound. "We're celebrating the Mass, Christ's victory over death... it's about what He's done for us." Fr. Charlie is always teaching us, even now when he is no longer with us.

When I asked why he chose this Gospel he told me "In all of the Gospels I could find no other passage that encompassed all of the Father's love for us so concisely. I fear we've lost the graciousness of the Father's forgiveness."

"A father had two sons." These simple words draw us into the story. We recognize what is to come. The words draw us into the love of our Father.

Most of us know the story Jesus tells us in the Gospel as the Prodigal son, and it's easy to focus on the sons in this parable. Some of us will relate with the younger, the one who insisted on his due and went off and squandered every cent of it. Others will relate with the older son - so many of us want to see ourselves as the responsible and loyal child. But Fr. Charlie focused on the Father and His graciousness—a father who loves his two children to the point of distraction, and wants them to love each other.

While the youngest son was still far off, the father saw him... ran to him...the father came out and pleaded with the oldest son.

The father never gave up on his sons. Nothing could separate him from his sons...neither death nor life...rulers or angels... things present or future...not anything in all of creation.

The father gave his sons their freedom. Freedom to do what they wanted even when he knew they would regret it, even when he knew how painful it would be.

His love was such that he helped them as much as he was able to; even when it caused him disgrace...even when it was insulting...even when it was hurtful.

He didn't worry about what others thought...he knew his mind... his heart ...it didn't need to make sense to others.

His sons are precious in his sight. He honors them and loves them. He will pay any price for them. The world around them was always second.

The words left unsaid in this parable are just as important as those that were spoken. The father didn't argue when his son chose to abandon the family and in as many words said "I wish you were dead" by asking for his inheritance.

His actions and the words he spoke have carried the weight of his love through the centuries. He doesn't ask his son to apologize when he comes back. He runs to him rejoicing! Accepts him back just as he is. Claims him as his own by dressing him in the finest robes and jewels; having a great feast!

This is my son! There is SO much pride and compassion and love, and, yes, even respect for his child in these words.

The proclamation that follows lets this son know the depth and heights of his fathers love. "He was dead and is alive again; lost and is found!" The father is so gentle in his forgiveness and absolution that it's easy to miss the message in his words.

The older son receives the same respect and love from his father. But the way it is shown is much different.

This time the father goes out to him in private. He pleads with him to come in. He listens to his son's objections and then admonishes him in a way that allows him to keep his dignity.

"You are always with me." "All I have is yours." "This brother of yours... he was dead and has come to life... he was lost and has been found."

The meaning in this reply is very subtle. I'm always with you and everything we have is yours to use as you like. Your brother is always your brother, just as he is always my son and when I forgive him, you must also forgive him, because that is part of your inheritance.

The graciousness of our Fathers' loving forgiveness shines forth in this parable just like the Christmas star.

The words and actions of the father in this Gospel and their effect on us are the final teaching from Fr. Charlie. It is his prayer for us that we choose our words and actions carefully, just as the Father choose His.

We won't be able to improve on Christ's words and actions. But we can surly learn from what He said and did.

We can practice His way of living, His way of forgiving, and His way of dying.