

Homily
Memorial Mass for Joseph Macri
December 6, 2017
St. Bernard Church
Deacon Tim Sullivan

101 Years and Filled With Joy

I had a very special privilege last Thursday night. I had made arrangements earlier in the day to bring Holy Communion to Joe Macri. All I knew about Joe is that he had just been released from the hospital, he had very little time left to live and that his daughters would be pleased if he could receive Holy Communion at least one more time.

When I entered the home at the address given to me, I found Joe on a bed in the living room, sound asleep, under a blanket with a big ND in the middle of it. There were several other items of Notre Dame paraphernalia in the room. Joe's daughters explained to me that Joe had lived in South Bend, Indiana, and had served as an usher at Notre Dame home football games for almost 40 years. They added that he had built his own home on Ironwood Drive in South Bend, very close to where Eddy's Restaurant used to be.

The family was excited to learn, and I was excited to tell them, that I had been a student at Notre Dame from 1966 to 1973, for college and law school. Joe would have ushered at all those Notre Dame football games I would have attended during those years.

Joe's daughter Jackie woke him up and introduced me to him, emphasizing our shared connection with Notre Dame. I ended up having a long conversation with him.

Despite being close to death, Joe had a gleam in his eye and a joyful spirit. He spoke lovingly of his wife, Jean, or Gina, with whom he shared 70 years of marriage. He said he had never raised his voice to her and that he had always tried to fulfill every one of her requests.

Joe had worked in South Bend at the Studebaker plant until it closed, then found work in another factory. About all those years he was employed, he said simply, "I worked hard."

I woke up in the middle of the night on Friday, actually early Saturday, and reflected on Joe's life. Some of my thoughts had to do with Notre Dame football, so I'd like to say a few words about why Notre Dame football was so special for Joe.

Immigrants, and especially Catholic immigrants, often had a very tough life. Looked down upon by many in their new country, they struggled to find good work and acceptance. When Notre Dame, a Catholic school with many immigrant players, began to enjoy success on the football field, it was only natural for Catholic immigrants around the United States to rally around Notre Dame football, even if you were Italian and the team was nicknamed the Fighting Irish.

Notre Dame football represented and upheld the highest values of Catholic immigrants. They played hard, but clean. They had a reputation for outworking and outthinking their opponents, winning even when the other teams seemed far superior. So Notre Dame was more than a football team. They embodied the distinctive ideals that inspired millions of Catholic immigrants. They stood for more than football; they stood for a way of life. That's why Joe Macri would have been such a Notre Dame fan.

So, as I reflected on what I knew about Joe Macri, I thought of how I would summarize the beauty and simplicity of his life. Here's what I came up with:

1. You do what you're supposed to do in every aspect of your life.
2. You do it as best as you can.
3. You experience the joy that comes when you do what you're supposed to do in every aspect of your life and you do it as well as you can.

May all of us be inspired by the example of Joseph Macri. May all of us live as he did, and, even in our final moments here on earth, may we, just like Joe, have a gleam in our eye and a joyful spirit.

Amen.