

T H E M E M O R A R E

*Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary,
that never was it known that
anyone who fled to thy protection,
implored thy help,
or sought thy intercession was left unaided.
Inspired with this confidence,
I fly unto thee,
O Virgin of virgins, my mother.
To thee do I come, before thee I kneel,
sinful and sorrowful.
O Mother of the Word Incarnate,
despise not my petitions, but in your mercy
hear and answer them. Amen.*

On Sunday September 15, 2013, the "Our Lady of Guadalupe Community celebrated a Memorial Mass for William "Billy" Barnoski. It was a fitting end to a week that saw several religious programs pay homage to a man many respected and some saw as invincible.

It all started on the morning of Tuesday September 10, when several of the men sat and fellowshiped, while consoling one another with stories of him. Later that afternoon, emotions were raw, when we were informed that per Deputy Karen DiNardo, we could not have a memorial service that night. In the end, Reverend Ken, shared his thoughts on Billy and our community, as did one of the volunteers Rosemary Reynolds. She encouraged us to "rise above the evil that surrounds us" and to "pray". So, we did. That night we celebrated an Eucharistic Celebration Service followed by a Memorial Service that went off without a hitch.

Then, on Wednesday afternoon, the community gathered as they shared stories of Billy and the impact he had on their life. That night the American Veterans in Prison; which Billy was a member of, honored him with a moment of silence. On Friday, the ALPHA group observed a moment of silence, followed by one of the volunteers Dennis, who stated that he has, "met many men over the course of his life but Billy was far and away...unique", and will be "missed".

On Sunday, we gathered together one last time to grieve as one. To move forward with our lives knowing that he is in a better place. But also to honor him by living out the teachings he bestowed upon us. The Mass was presided over by Father Bob Rivers, and attended by 86 prisoners and volunteers combined; some of whom were very emotional. The Mass began with the opening hymn "Precious Lord, take my hand" by Elvis Presley. At the front of the chapel stood a dry/erase board with a photo montage of Billy and his family taped to it.

One person observed the fact that the light above the pew where Billy sat, flickered for much of the Mass before remaining on. However, the object that caught many peoples attention was the

clock. It was not working. So, there was no way to manage the time as the Mass went on. At ten o'clock, someone put the correct time on the clock but it was the time, the clock was stuck on, that gave everyone goosebumps: 6:15, the time Billy died six days prior.

God works in mysterious ways. It's even more amazing how God works to fit everything together. The Mass readings for the day were: **Exodus 32:7-11, 13-14** and **2 Timothy 1:12-17**. However, the Responsorial Psalm could not have been any more apropos; "I will rise and go to my Father", [**Psalm 51 (Luke 15:18)**]. The Lord truly does have a way of speaking to us, we only need to listen.

The Gospel was on the Prodigal Son (**Luke 15:1-32**). A parable many have used to describe Billy's conversion back to the Lord. Father Bob, explained in his homily, "The son came back home because he had nowhere else to turn. He did not have a conversion; he was out of options! And when he did return he did not say; 'I am sorry'. Yet, the father welcomed him back without hesitation."

"When we come back to the Lord", he went on. "We may not have the perfect conversion or apology but, what you get is a sense of wholeness from coming back home."

During the Procession of the Gifts, five of the volunteers were chosen to participate. One by one; Mary-Jean, Laura, Mario, Judy and Daily, each brought the Gifts up to the Altar while the song "Change my Heart O God" played softly in the background. It was a special sight that made the Mass all the more glorious. You could truly see each of them beaming with love as they gracefully marched down the isle.

As Communion was distributed the song "Bridge over troubled water" by Simon and Garfunkel, set the tone. This was a song that Billy loved a great deal and would always emphasize certain stanza's in the song that meant something to him. He would explain the beauty of the words or just ask us to listen to the vocalization. It was a side of Billy not many talk about but he was a very passionate person and enjoyed sharing that passion with anyone who cared to listen.

As the Mass concluded time was afforded so that all in attendance could stretch their legs and view the the montage of photos. The Memorial Service began with a eulogy by Shawn Fisher, focusing on Billy's legacy being his family and not his past. Mike Skinner, followed by reading a poem by David A. Romano, entitled "When tomorrow starts without me". Frank Quinn, then gave another eulogy touching on what he spoke about on Tuesday night but added how **Hebrews 12:1-13**, relates to Billy's life by explaining, "Billy was disciplined in his faith and it showed in his teaching of it".

Mary-Jean, a long time volunteer who Billy loved very, very, very dearly, told the story of how even in his final hours, a former Nun came to his room and Billy asked her to pray The Memorare with him! "His devotion to our Blessed Virgin Mother, she said. "was such a big part of his life and evident in his final hours." Judy,

another volunteer that was near and dear to Billy, explained how Billy and her did not just talk about their faith they held each other to task. Whenever someone was in need, she would ask him to talk to them. And regardless of who they were he would go over and befriend that person. "He would ease whatever burden that person was carrying just by talking to them", she said. "He always said 'YES'". She challenged us all to do the same in Billy's honor.

The service closed with Herbert Earl, saying, "Billy was a friend who always helped those who could not help themselves". It was a fitting sentiment that depicted a Billy that those on the outside of our society never truly saw; and in a lot of cases refused to! Billy faced a tremendous amount of skepticism regarding his conversion. Yet, never once wavered in his convictions, or sought out accolades or affirmations. Deputy Karen DiNardo, once snidely remarked when told of his conversion, "don't believe it, he has'nt changed". Yet, throughout the week, stories of Billy's impact on peoples lives continued to filter out. It seems that even in death, he still defies his staunchest detractors as well as proving the Parable of the Prodigal Son can and does exist. All that's needed is the courage to say "yes" and the willingness to let go.

Billy once told me, "anyone can do what is easy, it's when you opt for the difficult that you prove you're a man". There's nothing on earth more difficult than change. His story should be the catalyst for all who are looking for change. We cannot do it alone. The Memorare; his favorite prayer, can help and is a step in the right direction. God bless. We Love you Billy.

by Shawn Fisher