

Funeral of Bill Cookston

Bulletin

Audio

'I too am a man under authority.'

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Bill once told me that he did not want to have an elaborate church funeral like this, with hymns and processions and all such ruckus. All I can say now is that, for the first time, I finally get to tell him what to do.

I do believe he eventually changed his mind, especially after the passing into glory of his beloved wife. But really, it does not matter much, for it is the Holy Church's sacred obligation to commend the spirit of the baptized into the heart of Christ, and the body of the baptized into the hallowed ground, there to rest until the Resurrection of all flesh; on this, Bill will simply have to follow orders.

I bring this up not to poke fun at Bill's well known propensity to express opinions. I bring it up for a reason. Bill was many things: an adoring father to his children, a loving husband to his wife, and to his pastor, a man who, in his earliest days preaching, he offered to take him and his pregnant wife out for an early lunch of fried chicken, and instead led them on a six hour rampage through the backcountry of Mississippi, conducted at unsafe and most definitely unlawful speeds. This pastor's wife went into an early labor the following day.

But alongside all these things, he was a soldier. For years, it seemed, there was not a Sunday that he did not saunter into the Lord's sanctuary wearing a baseball cap with the words 'One shot, one kill' boldly imprinted upon it. It always made an impression on me, especially when we would pray 'for the peace of the whole world.'

Indeed much about Bill expressed his military manner. He was a man of authority, and a man who respected authority. He cared about honor, dignity, and the

strength to uphold these. Even the way he spoke of Brenda after her death was as a man fighting for the memory of a fallen comrade among those living in comfort, who were unable to understand what a great soul had been lost.

The Christ too knew such men.

A centurion comes to our Lord. His servant is paralyzed, and deeply ill. He beseeches Jesus to have mercy upon this poor wretch, for he is *suffering greatly*.

But when the Lord turns to go find the servant, the centurion pleads with him not to visit. *'Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed.'*

'For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. And I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it.'

What the centurion is saying is simple: He is a soldier, a man under authority, and a man with authority. The centurion is sent by his emperor to command his men, and his men obey.

Yet with this, the gentile confesses the truth of Christ, and of His divine mission, for Christ too has been sent, yet not by any earthly ruler, but by the immortal and everlasting Father, King of the Universe, and God of the angel legions. And to accomplish His mission, Jesus indeed will give orders, He will give command to angels, to demons, to plagues, and to death; and altogether, they will obey.

For the demons He will cast out into the *unquenchable fire prepared for the devil and all his angels*.

Sickness and disease He will draw from our frail flesh as poison from a wound.

And death, He *will abolish*, as a judge with a single utterance of His breath; *the last enemy, made his footstool* that His saints might mount up to the heavenly mansions.

And the angels, these He will bid to come to the cradle of our late age, and to bear us home.

In the end, the Lord speaks, and the centurion's servant is healed.

It is a platitude to speak of the recently deceased as being at rest, as being asleep, as being free from suffering. These are not wrong, but ultimately it is not the place of the flesh of the saints, as they are lowered into the ground, to simply rest. Rather, they await the signal of their commander. This flesh of Bill's, immolated by fire and reduced to ash; it seems that never could a body do less; and yet I tell you, it is no simple body, but the body of one baptized into the host of God, of His rank and legion and host. This body is not resting; it is simply awaiting the orders.

The order will be simple, you see. It will be the same spoken of by the centurion. For when the fullness of time has come, and the days of the world have been completed; when the sun, moon and stars are dimmed, and the heavens rolled up like a scroll; when the earth will shake with terror, and the glory of the heavenly Jerusalem shall descend; when the *dwelling place of God will be with men*, and the Lord *will wipe every tear from our eyes*—on that day, the Lord Jesus will come to Bill, even as he was, even as he now is. He will lean over his grave, and will speak with the authority of a commander, and with the warmth of a friend, a single word:

'Come.'

'And Bill will come.'

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Preached by Pastor Fields

Homily Texts: Job 19:21-27; Revelation 21:1-7; Matthew 8:5-13.