

Church of the Good Shepherd  
and  
St. John the Evangelist

May 12, 2007  
Fr. Bill McGinty

**Russell Emmons, Jr.**

We gather today to celebrate a life, a very beautiful life; the life of Russell Emmons, Jr. At Christmas, Russell went home to his Go, where his Savior Jesus Christ was waiting to receive him with open arms and to say to him these words:

“Well done, good and faithful servant, you who have been faithful in little things receive now the reward that awaits you everlasting life in the Kingdom of my Father.”

The job that God gave Russell to do he has completed. His very presence among us Sunday after Sunday and year after year was in itself a witness to the Gospel and the message of Jesus: “Unless you become like little children, you will not enter the Kingdom of heaven”

When it comes to that line that forms for the Kingdom of heaven Russell was at the head of the queue. His winning smile and his capacity for friendship placed him there and made us think of what truly matters in this life.

A couple of years ago I went to see Russell at Scranton Community Hospital. He had been very ill and his health had given cause for grave concern. We chatted and talked and he joined me in the prayers and communion which he knew by heart. By his bed were his Bible and his Book of Common Prayer. Despite being sick he was not down or depressed but looking forward to going home to his facility and to his friends. He told me how much he liked it there and how well they looked after him.

There was joy in Russell’s life, his love for his parents and their love and care of him. His love of his sister, June and the holidays he spent with her.

Our first reading speaks of “the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.” Today, for Russell it is the light of the knowledge of God. It is a knowledge so deep and profound that today he has an understanding we could not begin to comprehend.

In the words of scripture, “The Lord has lifted up the lowly and confounded the great and the mighty.”

The words of II Timothy find St. Paul at the end of his mission and he too is yearning for the rest that God will bring: “I have done my best in the race. I have run the full distance and I have kept the faith.”

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Today we pray these words with Russell in mind. His struggles are over; his suffering is at an end, he kept the faith that his parents taught him and deserves the prize that Christ's Resurrection promises: the love of his God.

There is a deep sense that so many years ago, our Lord Jesus Christ called Russell. He called him just as he called those disciples on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Every time he stepped into his church, every visit to the communion rail, every hand he shook at the peace, spoke of a total unquestioning faith and asked each one of us to pull up our socks and try to respond to Jesus and his Gospel in the same way.

Today's Gospel from St. John is so appropriate for today's service, for not only was John the Evangelist Russell's church and patron, but the word that John speaks of, surely resided and found a home in this good and faithful man. The rest of us may think we understand this great creed, but it found a home in Russell.

As we pray this Eucharist today in memory and honor of Russell we also remember that this was his church. It was here that he united with the Body of Christ in communion. He will always be a part of that body. He is just now, closer to its heart and head. Today he enjoys the love that is God and all you who loved him know that Christ's grace will flow to you in his honor.

May he rest with the saints in eternal light?

Amen+