



THE NATIONAL FRATERNITY OF THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER - USA

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

National Minister, Jan Parker, OFS

THE TAU, THE NAMETAG AND THE TOMBSTONE

Celebrating the life of Deacon Tom Bello, OFS

September 17, 1949 – March 29, 2016

Our brother Tom passed from this life to the next on March 29, but he is still speaking to us in ways that go beyond words. I was honored to be at his wake and funeral, and privileged to share some precious moments with Tom's wife, Judy, and their family. Some of what I saw and heard those two days I want to share with you.

Tom was buried wearing his deacon's alb, and in his hands was a light green plastic rosary. Tom also chose to wear two distinct signs of his membership in the Secular Franciscan Order.

First, a TAU cross.

The TAU cross he wore was prominent, very similar to the one pictured here, reflecting Tom's Franciscan heart and his 33 years as a professed Secular Franciscan. Tom lived the Gospel life fully. He greatly valued the privileged place of fraternity as he journeyed with us, daily embracing the call to ongoing conversion and bringing joy and hope to all.



The red stole, draped across the TAU, symbolizes Tom's ordination to the diaconate four years after his profession. Tom truly was among us as "one who serves" – a deacon of the Church, a wonderful

proclaimer of the Gospel and a dedicated servant leader — but I could not help seeing the color red and immediately thinking of God's mercy and love, shown by Tom to all, and thinking, too, of the Holy Spirit, so active in Tom's life.

Secondly, just below the TAU Cross, Tom wore his name tag from our 2015 NAFRA Chapter, bearing our theme, "Be the Joyful Face of Christ to All."



There it was, just as he had worn it when we last gathered with him in October. I looked at his nametag and then at Tom's face, which even in death seemed joyful, and then of course I thought of his laugh. What great times we have all shared with Tom! How easily we can picture him with us, as he was so often. Tom loved being a member of our national Franciscan family, and he had no problem showing this by being buried with his NAFRA nametag. Are you as struck by this as I am? I love it.

He held a rosary. Tom's devotion to Our Lady was so great! I asked Tom's wife Judy "why this particular rosary?" She replied, "Of course, as you may not be shocked to hear, Tom had more rosaries than I could ever count, all of which are special and many of which were given him by OFS folks at each of the regions he visited. I chose the green one in particular because he held it throughout the last months of his illness. Why? I believe because of: its Franciscan austerity (its value came from what it represented, not any worldly value of its materials); its color (green connoting peace to Tom, who as president of the student body at UNC had signed all his correspondence in green ink); and its simplicity (focusing the mind and heart on what is important, and pruning out what is not.)"

On the day of the wake, I heard about Tom's tombstone. As Tom's daughter Jackie shared on her Facebook page: "The burial coordinator said never in

her 17 years of experience had someone requested a tombstone without a name on it, but that was my dad's wish. He wanted just one verse on his tombstone: "Sin has increased, but grace has far surpassed it." (Romans 5:20). I think it represents his humility and his belief in God's mercy and love." How I marveled at this! Tom's name is written in the Book of Life; it doesn't need to be on his tombstone. His priority was to proclaim the Good News of God's mercy and love. Tom rejoiced in the grace shown to him, a sinner. How often he encouraged us to rejoice, as well, at how God "mercies us," and to "be the merciful presence of God" to all we meet. That his tombstone should proclaim God's mercy, and say nothing about Tom, is perfect.

Yes, Tom continues to speak to us, and I don't think he's done yet. Maybe there's a message for us in the Scriptures or in the songs he chose for his funeral? The Scriptures: Wisdom 3:1-6, Psalm 27, Colossians 3:12-17 and Matthew 5:1-12a. The songs: O God, Beyond All Praising; Here I Am, Lord; Amazing

Grace; On Eagle's Wings; Quietly Peacefully (Going Home); and Sing with All the Saints in Glory. As to the message, I'm listening carefully - Tom was always a teacher of second languages.

When Tom and I last visited on March 3, he asked me to speak at his funeral Mass. He whispered to me, "Do the Franciscan part." On the day of the funeral I did the best I could, but for those of us who knew and loved him, it was Tom who "did the Franciscan part." Tom was a Franciscan all the way to the end, but he would be the first to remind me, "There is no end." He's right. It's not over. Love endures forever.

Dear Franciscan brothers and sisters, as each of us remembers how Tom touched our lives let us resolve to "begin again" to live lives worthy of our call. May the love of God, and our love for our brother Tom, impel us.

Peace, love and every blessing!

Your sister,

Jan

EULOGY OF DEACON TOM BELLO OFS

by Jan Parker OFS

When Tom and I last visited on March 3, 2016, he asked me to speak at his funeral Mass. He whispered to me, "Do the Franciscan part." What I hope to do here today is share with you Tom's Franciscan heart.

Thirty-three years ago this June, when Tom was 33, he made this profession: "By the grace of God, I consecrate myself to the service of his kingdom, and I promise to live all the days of my life the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Secular Franciscan Order." On that day Tom made a lifelong commitment to the Franciscan Order.

The Secular Franciscan Order, formerly known as the Third Order of St. Francis, is a religious order for the lay members of the Church. We live with our families and work out in the world, but gather regularly with our Franciscan brothers and sisters in our local fraternities. It is there that we are formed and transformed, as we strive for ongoing daily conversion.

To live the Franciscan life is a call on our heart, and a true vocation; it is a call that Tom heard and followed. Tom offered himself as a servant of God, and by God's grace, he became a

wonderful gift to the Order, to the world and to each of us who knew him.

If you knew Tom, you knew a lot about being Franciscan. He was so joyful, bringing hope and joy to others; walking the path of peace; embracing the poor; and living a life of mercy and forgiveness. His arms were outreached to all. He lived simply, with profound humility. Tom rejoiced always in the total goodness of God and in all God's creation. He rejoiced in the overflowing love of a God who poured himself out for us by becoming one like us in the Incarnation — Jesus, suffering for us, emptying himself on the Cross, and giving the gift of Himself always in the Eucharist, feeding us, uniting us. Tom lived this Franciscan life with a passionate love of God, and constant, constant prayer. Tom always said, "The focus is Christ. The end is salvation. The way is love."



Tom truly lived the Gospel life — and oh how he could proclaim the Gospel! He was a true servant — as a husband, a father, a Deacon, and our Franciscan brother. He was a servant in leadership at every level of fraternity — local, regional, and for

six years as the National Minister of our 12,000 brothers and sisters in our country. Tom knew hundreds of our brothers and sisters by name. Tom was known, loved and appreciated by those in our international fraternity as well.

Tom was a spiritual leader in every sense, and he taught us not just by words, but by actions. What a gift to our Order! He gave us such insights, making the Gospel real and personal, and did it with such joy! Tom encouraged us, and he walked with us. Our brother — our joyful, goofy, wonderful and holy brother Tom who said, “I’m a simple guy” — and he was. I know many members of our Franciscan family are here — and many more are here in spirit. Tom loved us, and referred to us as his beloved Franciscan family. He was always so present to each of us. It was a blessing to be with Tom, who truly lived in the present moment. How he blessed us! He would reach out and touch us, blessing us with the love of God. Such love!

Tom always said, “Love is *always* the source, the goal, the means and the measure.”

Tom found this love of God daily in the celebration of the Eucharist. His prayer of praise at each Mass, at the consecration and elevation of the Host and the Cup, was “My Love, my Light, my Life, my Lord and my God! My God and my All”

Tom and I always sang when we were together, and it seems right that I should sing again now the song we last sang together when he was here with us. In the words of St Francis: *Let us bless the Lord, the Living and true God! Let us always give back to God praise, glory, honor, blessing and every good! Amen, so be it! Amen!*

Oh, Tom, you did give back to God – you gave your heart, your soul, your love! Thank you for giving God so much, so that you could give *us* so much! I’ll see you soon.

Dear Wonderful Franciscans, Secular and Otherwise!

In the weeks since Tom was called Home by the Lord, the family and I have striven to thank earnestly each and every one of you who has written, texted, called, or emailed your prayers and sympathy. We are profoundly grateful to you all, especially since the Secular Franciscans are so near and dear to Tom's heart.

Alas, in my all-too-human frailty, my energy is flagging to pen more individual thank-you notes. With apologies, I am resorting to what is more do-able: the mass (but still sincere!) thanks to all. (In this Year of Mercy, please try to think of it as a group Christmas or Easter letter.)

Tom was so special that, naturally, he leaves a churning wake behind him. The perpetual motion of that churning represents the energy with which he loved us all and which we reciprocated. Ours now is a renewed opportunity to apply such joyful energy in ways that would make Our Lord, St. Francis and Tom all rejoice and be glad.

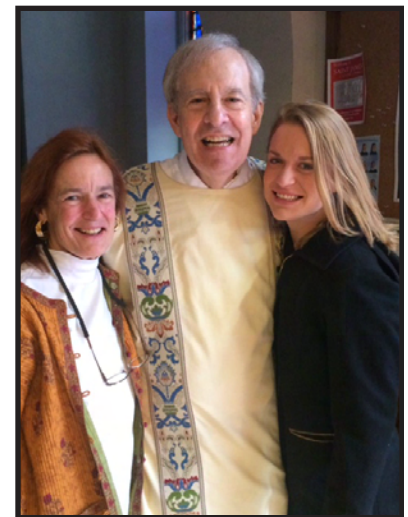
For example, one of my most immediate projects is to construct an All Souls Memorial Rose Garden in our backyard. I've cleared a large space of its turf and am now busily but carefully planting red, pink and yellow Knock-Out roses (which Tom preferred to call "ever-reblooming" roses). The kids, grandkids and I will make all-weather aluminum tags in loving memory of all those who have preceded us and remain in our hearts forever. Tom will beam down on us at our dedication ceremony!

In a more mundane but practically useful vein, I gathered all the OFS T-shirts Tom received when he visited so many regions, and am having a quilt made. On chilly winter nights (and even some warm summer evenings directly under a ceiling fan), the kids and I will snuggle under the Franciscan quilt.

Regarding options for longer-term commitments, I am in a period of discernment about the most meaningful ways to invest my time and energy going forward. Thank you for your prayers to help me understand how I best can offer service in a very needy world.

Most of all, thanks for your longtime support of Tom and his ministry — which is *your* ministry — and for all the service, prayers and love you have shared and inspired so widely.

Judy Bello
McLean, Virginia
May 17, 2016



Tom surrounded by wife, Judy Bello and daughter, Jackie Bello.