

## Mass of Thanksgiving Homily

Msgr. Earl Provenza

It is a profound and humbling privilege to honor a person and a priest who has had such a profound effect on the people of the Diocese of Shreveport. Along with Msgr. Carson La Caze, Msgr. Earl Provenza was truly a legend within our local Catholic world and civic community. With his everyman qualities, he was able to connect with people of all ages, personalities and walks of life. Msgr. brought a human face to the Catholic priesthood. He was street smart and had a good business mind. He enjoyed good food and spirits. He appreciated college and professional sports. He was actively involved in the Krewe of Centeur Mardi Gras association. He rode motorcycles and loved classic trucks. He ran multiple marathons. I get exhausted just saying that part. Msgr. intentionally took himself off the traditional priest pedestal and loved and served people for who they were and where they were at, both in their life and

faith. And he was loved, respected, and treasured for these very reasons.

I believe our Gospel reading was the perfect selection for Msgr. Provenza because it powerfully captured his active spirituality. He sought to love and serve the Lord by loving and serving the people of God. He showed how much he loved Jesus Christ by how he so totally invested himself into the people entrusted to his care. As the title of his recent book proclaimed, “Busy, Busy, For the Lord.” He was a Tasmanian devil in the constant whirlwind of energy and passion he brought to his priestly ministry. He was a 24/7 kind of priest. When the phone rang, he answered the bell to be there for the people of God, regardless of the time of day, or the personal or spiritual situation they were in.

He brought “glad tidings to the lowly” by helping the sick and suffering, the less fortunate, and by being there for others in the lowest points in their lives. He was truly elite in his bedside manner and the frequency of his follow-up through pastoral visits and phone calls. He helped “to heal the brokenhearted”

through his words of hope and deeds of empathy and compassion. He “proclaimed liberty to captives” by helping people to see “a way through” when they were convinced there was none. He “proclaimed release to prisoners” by striving to bring deliverance to those who were imprisoned by their sins, addictions, shame and guilt, or clever rationalizations. He did this through the Sacrament of Reconciliation, pastoral counseling, spiritual direction, and preaching and teaching. He announced “a year of favor from the Lord” by joyfully and generously leading people into the light of Christ’s abundant love, mercy, and truth.

One of his favorite ways to build up the faith and hope of the people during difficult times, was by providing them with a copy of the reflection, “There’s a Reason.” I would like to share that with you now. “For every pain that we must bear, every burden, every care. There’s a reason. For every grief that bows the head, for every tear drop that is shed. There’s a reason. For every hurt, for every plight, for every lonely pain-racked night. There’s a reason. But if we trust in God as we

should, it all will work out for our good. He knows the reason.”

In the words of Pope Francis, Msgr. had the “smell of his sheep.” He knew his people. He cared for them with a whole-hearted devotion. Therefore, I would contend that he had the “smell of the Shepherd,” the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ. Msgr. Provenza truly loved his priesthood. It provided him with a clear sense of mission and meaning. Therefore, the sacrificial love with which he served was a true labor of love. It is what made him feel most alive and closest to Jesus Christ.

Msgr. Provenza was a master storyteller. He had a down-home way of making the Gospel of Jesus Christ and church teaching come alive through the sharing of his personal experiences and other stories that were funny, inspirational, and thought provoking.

If I did my math correctly, I first served under Msgr. Provenza when he was in the prime of his life. He was 53. I was stationed at St. John Berchman as a Seminarian, and he was in the middle of the Cathedral renovation. I saw firsthand his uncanny and

remarkable ability to bring people together for a common purpose, both in terms of volunteer service and raising money. He was truly a graced mixture of a shepherd, community builder, fundraiser, and cheerleader. In fact, the reason the reception is a “potluck meal” is completely inspired by the philosophy and example of Msgr. He was fond of saying something like, “If it takes two people to do something, get twelve.” He was all about people working together. He knew it built relationships and community. He knew it inspired personal and family investment.

Even though I have known Msgr. Provenza since 1990, I have gotten the opportunity to know him better, in the last five years. We rode together to the priest retreat in Arkansas. I have had the opportunity to administer the sacraments to him in times of sickness and suffering. We shared Masses together here at Mary Queen of Peace. Through it all, I became increasingly touched by his love for Jesus Christ, the people of God, and his priesthood. I have been simultaneously inspired and challenged by the priestly standard of excellence he

has set for all of us priests. He is to be looked up to, and admired, for his priestly generosity and sacrificial service. One of the smallest Diocese's in the United States has been blessed with one of the more "larger than life" priests. In a unique way, he was a big fish in a small pond. What a blessing! He was truly one of a kind. He is truly unforgettable.

This brings to mind the opening stanza of Alan Jackson's song, "What A Day Yesterday Was:" "Looking through these old photographs, don't they bring some good memories back. Some of them make us laugh, some make us cry. I'm glad we kept all these souvenirs, to prove our love was here. Look how happy we were, pictures don't lie. If forever should end today, and there's no tomorrow for us. What a day yesterday was." "What a day yesterday was," when it comes to the moments and experiences we shared and created with Msgr. Provenza. He is the type of person and priest that leaves an indelible mark on your soul. May we regularly call to mind "what a day yesterday was," with him, through cherished memories, pictures, and gifts received from him. In a

spirit of gratitude, may we celebrate all that he meant “to us” and all that he did “for us.”

Because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, our forever with Msgr. Provenza has not ended. We can be spiritually united with him by praying for the repose of his soul. It is my understanding that is something he asked people to do for him after his death. Let us honor his wishes. We can also be united with him by talking to him whenever he comes to mind and asking him to pray for us as we go through life and seek to work out our own eternal salvation.

Most of all, we will have the opportunity to be forever reunited with him, in the Father’s house, where together, we will offer eternal praise, thanksgiving, and adoration to Jesus Christ, the Great and Eternal High Priest.

Msgr. Earl Provenza, “you are a priest forever, in the line of Melchizedek.”