

To Love is To Remember: A Reflection on the Ministry of Archbishop Job of
Chicago
Archpriest John Matusiak

For weeks, the teens and young adults of our parish had been looking forward to our annual outing to downtown Chicago on Saturday, December 19, 2009. The day's plans included taking the commuter train into the city, visiting the European-style outdoor Christmas mart in Daly Plaza, walking up State Street and the Magnificent Mile, delighting in the holiday windows at Macy's [the new, much disputed name of Marshall-Fields], and riding the elevators at Water Tower Place.

Upon learning of our plans, Archbishop Job invited us to gather at his residence early that evening for pizza, provided that he returned in time from his visit to Cleveland earlier that week. He said he would call upon his return to confirm our plans.

On Friday, December 18, just as I was leaving one of my grandson's preschool Christmas pageants, my phone rang. The voice on the other end was not that of Archbishop Job. Rather, the caller informed me that the Archbishop had fallen asleep in the Lord en route from Cleveland to Chicago. I was in disbelief, for an instant in shock -- not only for myself, my family, and the faithful of our parish, but for the young people whom he so loved, who were looking forward to joining the Archbishop for pizza the following day.

That evening, a number of parents called to enquire as to whether our outing would be cancelled, in light of the tragic news. Not sure what to do, I tried to imagine what Archbishop Job would have said had we decided to cancel the outing. All I could hear were the words he so often said in similar situations -- "But I'm not worthy."

So, we gathered as planned on Saturday morning, some 30 strong. Everyone had heard the tragic and unexpected news, so it was only appropriate that, before catching the train, we sang a Panikhida, not only for the repose of our beloved archpastor, but as a means of affirming our hope in the risen Christ. We hung the customary black bunting over the entrance to the church, even as we recalled how the Archbishop would have wanted us, as he often said, to "proceed as usual."

Of late, many individuals, far more eloquent, have penned wonderful and heartfelt tributes to Archbishop Job since his untimely repose. His love for his flock, his patient nature, his willingness to listen to any and every concern, his long-suffering in the face of humiliation, controversy, scandal, and seemingly endless crises, and his tenacity to pursue truth are indeed well known. Recalling all that he had done -- and had suffered, especially during the last years of his life -- is, at last, a necessary and essential aspect of that mourning we must experience if we, as Christ promises in the beatitudes, are to be comforted in our collective and personal loss.

"To love is to remember," wrote Father Alexander Schmemmann in 1975. "And to remember with

love is truly to understand that which one loves and remembers, to appropriate it as God's gift." And while Archbishop Job was indeed a gift to us collectively, as the People of God, during the most turbulent period of our Church in America's history since the first quarter of the 20th century, it is in our personal, individual memories that we come to a deeper understanding of "that [whom] one loves and remembers."

In the fall of 1968, Archbishop Job shared the classroom with many who, to this day, serve the Church -- Myron Manzuk, Ted Boback, George Alexson, Frank Mayernick, Michael Doder, Joe Gallick, Peter Telencio, the Chupek brothers, Paul Mercurieff, and others, myself included. It was a turbulent time. Woodstock was in the offing, society was in a state of flux, "tune in, turn on, drop out" was the prevalent ideology, and Vietnam war protests were approaching fever pitch. We were sheltered from that which was swirling around us -- after all, we were living in South Canaan, Pennsylvania, nestled safely and somewhat lost in time between the Pocono mountains and the Anthracite Valley. We prayed together and studied together. We sang on the kliros and chanted in the monastery church together. We went on endless "mission trips" and attended the occasional R Club dance at parishes in "the valley." And, from time to time, we were called to give an accounting for our deeds -- and occasional mis-deeds -- before Archbishop Kiprian. For example, many years later, Archbishop Job was fond of recounting how, in the middle of the night of October 29, 1968, he and a few of our aforementioned schoolmates snuck into the room I shared with Gary Matychak and placed a duck in our closet, and how after chapel prayers the following morning, the lot of us were summoned to the office of Archbishop Kiprian. "But why, why, WHY did you put a duck in their closet?" Archbishop Kiprian demanded. The future Archbishop Job's response: "Because we couldn't get the cow through the front door!" Lesson learned.

Those were simple and innocent times, happy times, the proverbial "formative years" that Archbishop Job so loved to recall, as recently as July 2009, when he shared what he always referred to as "the duck story" with our parishioners when he visited our parish with Metropolitan Jonah.

Years later, many of us found ourselves serving together in New England and the Midwest, under Archbishop Job's omophorion. Times had changed. The Church had changed. And we had changed. "That was then; this is now," as the old saying goes. Life became far more complex, as were the issues we faced as "coworkers and fellow ministers." Yet Archbishop Job always made himself available to us, to our families, and especially to the faithful we were so blessed to serve. When questions arose in our parish concerning the revelations that came to light in 2005, Archbishop Job gladly accepted our invitation to address our faithful in a forthright, honest, and open manner -- three times! We could sense his deep pain and concern, but on a deeper level, we also sensed his genuine love for the Church and for those who maligned him personally for the fervent stand he had taken. At the same time, during the many archpastoral visits during which he led us in worship and shared the Eucharist with us, he radiated the joy of the Kingdom yet to come, yet fully present in the life of the Church. He prayed with us. He shared countless pot lucks with us -- how often he was the last person remaining the church hall, always offering to help us clean up. He laughed with us, opened himself to "stump the bishop" question-and-answer

sessions with our Church school children, broke ground for our new temple and hall, brought guest hierarchs to visit us, and even played the accordion with us – both of us were products of those bygone days during which accordion lessons were absolutely mandatory for every kid whose name ended in -ski, -sky, -cky, -chuk, and -iak. Despite the burdens he faced and bore, often in bold silence, he always radiated something deeper, something “more real,” something beyond the disappointments and tragedies of this life, and left us inspired, uplifted, filled with joy and reassurance and peace and a renewed spirit to see and experience the Church as “the pure Bride of Christ,” despite the fact that we are, as Saint Paul observes, “broken earthen vessels.”

In conclusion, in mid-November, precisely one month before his repose, Archbishop Job met with the clergy of our Chicago deanery. He addressed us, a “full house,” at length about all sorts of issues and ideas and things that were on his mind -- 18 or 19 of them, in fact -- in a comprehensive yet extremely personal, relaxed, and even tender manner. There was something different about him -- something gloriously positive that made a few of us wonder if his sight had been set on something greater, something far more vast than our diocese, something perhaps divine. He related how, several weeks earlier, he had visited Saint Tikhon’s Monastery in conjunction with the ongoing investigation into the monastery’s finances. “I just couldn’t visit the monastery without calling on Metropolitan Herman,” he said without the slightest hint of angst -- adding how good it was to embrace him and to speak frankly and freely with him about much of what had transpired in the Church during the past few years. His face was calm, but hardly expressionless; he exhibited that calmness which comes when true reconciliation, no matter how painful, occurs. That was the last time most of us saw Archbishop Job -- and it was good.

While, on Saturday, December 19, we were unable to enjoy pizza with Archbishop, we anticipate that day in which we will once again commune with him, with all the angels and saints, with one another, and with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit at that glorious and eternal banquet for which we pray “with boldness and without condemnation” to be accounted worthy to share in Our Lord’s heavenly Kingdom.

May your memory, dear Vladyka, be eternal!