

Thank you all for coming today as we gather here to entrust Fr. Bill into the hands of our Loving Savior.

There are so many stories that many of us could share -- of Fr. Bill and his dogs. And while I know that this is really not the time or place, I can't resist just a couple -- because they endeared him to us who knew him.

Fr. Bill was convinced that Bonnie, pictured here with him, was the most intelligent dog God had ever created. One time as he was leaving for retreat, I was given detailed instructions on her care and grooming -- with Bonnie present of course.

Father picked up a large container of pills and said, "She gets three of these a day. She thinks they're treats, but they're really: V-I-T-A-M-I-N-S."

Another time on a late Sunday night when Fr. Rick Miller and I were returning from Steak-and-Shake, Fr. Rick took his cane and rapped on Fr. Bill's basement window. Of course, Bonnie went crazy. You could hear her outside.

When we got to the dining room I took the cane and went outside and rapped some more. And when I returned you could hear the barks from the basement. And Fr. Rick chuckled and said, "Can you imagine what's going on down there right now?!"

About 10 minutes later we heard the doorbell and even remarked, "Who could that be at 10:30 on a Sunday night?" We went to the door and there were 4 police officers. "Fr. Vath called and said there were prowlers on the premises and we should come to find them." Father Bill had simply called the police on us. And when we told the story months later at a group here, Fr. Bill said, "Yes. And I'd do it again."

And there are so many more stories -- some written down and some that still need to be.

But what most needs to be said here today is what he once told me he wanted said at his funeral. We used to argue about who would get to go Home first. And he told me one day, "At my funeral, don't canonize me for Heaven's sake. It's the worst thing you could do! Tell the people to pray for me. I mean it!" And he did mean it.

Fr. Bill was a true believer who loved the Church, who loved Jesus and who loved Mary. And he told anybody who would listen. He was straightforward, and direct and very much to the point.

After a thorough "wellness" check-up 15 or so years ago, this was his take: "I told the bishop: I'm the only certifiably SANE priest the diocese has! And I plan to keep reminding them of it!"

Over the years, Fr. Bill provided spiritual direction and confession and advice to countless souls. Just last night one man told me that after he graduated last in his class in high school, Fr. Bill urged him to go to college anyway, and the man got his degree.

And so it went -- in counseling or spiritual direction or Confession -- simple, straightforward, direct. I would sometimes complain to him about this or that going on in my life, and at the end he'd always say, "Tim...Jesus is worth it." Good advice. Simple advice. True advice: "No matter what, Jesus is worth it."

Fr. Bill had a sense of humor and could laugh at himself. One day at the end of Mass during the announcements, he fell asleep. When one of the servers nudged him, he woke up, stood up, and began, "We believe in one God..." And after the Creed and the petitions...realizing where he was, he said, "Bet you thought I forgot I'd done this already, didn't you?!"

One day he forgot to incense the Altar at the beginning of Mass, so he did it during the Gloria instead." I sent a small note to the server that said, "Are you insane?" Fr. Bill took a pen out of his pocket, scribbled something down and sent it back to the sacristy with the server. It said, "Better late than never."

Fr. Bill was a prayer warrior to the end. And he prayed his rosary to the end. And he was a priest to the end. And he loved his priesthood.

When Fr. Bill retired to St. Augustine Home, where the Little Sisters of the Poor took such wonderful care of him, he told me, "I don't belong here! It's all old people!"

But he lived there with Grace and was present to those around him, and made friends and those who shared his table, including Fr. Joe Faulkner's Mother, enjoyed him immensely.

When last Thursday I heard how gravely ill he was, Fr. Samuel and I drove to the hospital in Indianapolis. Father was calm and peaceful and suffered no pain.

Sr. Charles Patricia and Father Samuel and some of Father Bill's friends prayed at his bedside. He received once again the Apostolic Pardon. We prayed the Divine Mercy chaplet he so loved, and held his hand.

And shortly after we sang the "Salve Regina," he passed peacefully into the arms of Our Lord.

It reminded me of a few years ago, when Fr. Rick Miller went safely Home from his room in the Rectory -- when Fr. Bill was at HIS side, and shortly after we'd sung the Salve Regina.

And last Thursday, I thought to myself: "This is how a priest should die...with priests around his bedside, holding his hand, praying, pardoning -- surrounded by the Hope and Comfort our Faith offers us."

To my brother priests, I pray it can and will be this way for all of us -- side-by-side to the end -- validating and making present the promise of Jesus, "I am with you always..."

And now into Christ's hands we commend our Fr. Bill -- to enjoy his Mom's and Dad's and God's Presence forever -- and Bonnie's too -- if as Fr. Bill deeply believed, "Dogs do go to Heaven too after all."