

Funeral of Dr. Peter A.F. Morrin

12 October 2007

Wisdom 4:7-15

John 14:1-6

“Understanding, this is man’s grey hairs,” the writer says. “Untarnished life, this is ripe old age.”

I first heard the name of Dr. Peter Morrin more than forty years ago; I first met him a number of years later; and I have read a good deal about him in the last few days. The picture of the man who emerged, from my first hearing of him four decades ago until the last word that I read about him yesterday afternoon, has never changed. Touches may have been added; refinements may have been made; but that is all. The man whom we gather to remember today is the same person about whom I heard so many years ago: a man of outstanding achievement and integrity; a modest man; a family man; a man of faith. That is simply who he was.

Others will speak this afternoon. They may talk of the physician, the teacher, the ethicist, the friend. They may remember the father and grandfather whom they loved, and whose example will continue to guide their lives. I will speak only of why we are here. I will be brief and I will keep the distance that deep respect demands.

Put simply, we are here for one reason: Peter Morrin was a man of profound faith. I do not know how many times I saw him and Mariella quietly enter this Cathedral on a Sunday morning, usually for the eight o’clock Mass, and take their place. There was always that same gentle smile, even before I knew for sure who he was. That commitment to his creed may have come from his surgeon father, or his physician mother, or his Irish roots, or his Benedictine training, or some other source altogether. But, regardless of its origin, it was bred in the bone, and it was at the very core of who he was. That is surely what permitted him to say, as he lay motionless, awaiting death: *“I have no regrets, and I have no fear.”* We should all be so blessed!

He would have heard a hundred times those words of the Gospel: *“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust in me ... I will go and prepare a place for you.”* That promise he believed.

It was somewhat later in his career when ethical issues relating to health care became a focus of his time and talent. Perhaps that same deep faith played a role in completing the picture that was this man. In his provision of care to his patients, he began to see the impending clash between legitimate need and limited resources. Who would receive treatment? How are decisions

made fairly? How are they made ethically? He saw the need to study the issue - and he did. His dilemma then has become everyone's dilemma now.

Peter Morrin was way too much of a renaissance man, and his world view was too broad, ever to believe that there was only one answer – one way to answer – questions of such complexity. But he also knew early the necessity of looking squarely at this issue which would not go away, and he applied to that task the same acute mind and rigorous discipline that he had brought to everything else in his life.

But he also took to that study a precious asset: a profound belief in the innate dignity and worth of every human being. That conviction was at the heart of his creed; his faith taught him that. He taught that respect to generations of medical students, and he attempted to protect that value in the developing discipline of ethical thought. For Peter Morrin, ethics was an opportunity - and an obligation - to bring to an emerging aspect of medicine the rigor which the times and resources would demand. And that was what he did.

Peter Morrin's life was proof that there need be no conflict between scientific investigation at the highest level and a personal faith at the deepest level. He took them both very seriously. Both were at the core of his being. Both combined made him the man whom we gather to remember, and whose life and achievement we celebrate.

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Monsignor Joseph Lynch