

Homily for Dick Hauser, S.J.

Dick chose all of today's readings. In Isaiah we hear:

***Indeed, this is our God; we look to him,
and he saves us!***

***This is the LORD to whom we look;
let us rejoice and be glad that he has saved us!***

And from Romans:

***For those who are led by the Spirit of God are
children of God.ⁱ***

Dick's books and teachings said it all.

Years ago Dick, as he always did, suggested a book to me, Fredrick Buechner's Sacred Journey. I loved it and used a quote from it in my book Vision Quest. Dick always said, "You might want to read this book..." And they were always great. His last recommendation was Richard Rohr's, the Sacred Dance, about the Trinity – which I loved reading. Sacred Journey is an accurate description of our friendship.

I knew Dick at MUHS. He didn't know me. He was in A class because of his scholastic ability. I wasn't. We didn't have many classes together until Dick dropped Greek and we were in Mr. Ray Windle's B Latin class. Dick always had his hand up.

We joined the Jesuits the same year, 1955, I didn't think much of the rules, and Dick got migraines trying to follow the rules. He was made spiritual father for the incoming 1st year novices. We had both novice experiments together, a month in a local hospital, and 8 weeks at the St

Paul Retreat house. Our novice master, Joe Sheehan, had asked Dick to keep an eye on me. And Dick never did report that I arranged a family visits in the hospital and in the train station during the MKE stopover between Oshkosh and St. Paul while Dick wandered around the station alone, missing his MKE family.

We really didn't become close friends until 7 years later. He joined me teaching in our 3rd year of regency at St Francis Indian mission where we each had life changing experiences. He learned to pray in a new way by taking long walks at night under the beautiful South Dakota skies. I wondered what I was going to as a Jesuit and asked myself what I love doing & answered photography. It was Dick who eventually helped me realize it was how the Spirit speaks to each of us in our hearts.

During our years of theology, Dick struggled always to understand how the doctrine applied to his and our lives. As he was learning theology, I was working to improve my photography. I doubt if I would have gotten through the course work without Dick's help. He also introduced me at that time to the value of keeping a journal.

During our theology studies, a group of us, including Dick, Mike Morrison, Bert Thelen, and others, gave 22 retreats at Creighton University; these were mandated retreats to the Medical, law, pharmacy, dental students. Attendance was taken. We used slides and music and knew the new teachings of Vatican II. We both came to love Creighton.

Fr. Lee Lubbers asked me to have an exhibit, and then asked if I wanted to teach Photography. So 1969 I took his offer of a job teaching photography at Creighton.

Dick went to Catholic U to obtain a PHD in Theology. He told me how difficult it was for him to write each day. Typical of Dick, he called his dissertation, his friend.

We developed a deeper friendship and love when Dick arrived at Creighton in 1972, and began teaching theology classes. Those early years were extremely difficult for Dick. He was teaching about God, the Holy Spirit, in our hearts, not concepts in our heads. Some theology professors termed his classes “window dressing’ and lobbied to get Dick fired from the faculty. Those were difficult years for Dick. He was finally vindicated when Abbot Thomas Keating labeled Dick’s book one of the best spiritual theology books in America. Later as theology departmental chair, he was astonished at how some Jesuit universities taught Religious Studies as a discipline not as doctrine that has implications for our lives. To this day, Creighton’s Theology department stands out among Jesuit Universities for its focus on discovering God in our lives.

This is Dick Hauser’s legacy.

We made many trips together retreat together in Wyoming’s Ten Sleep Canyon. In the ‘70’s he introduced me to Centering prayer during those retreats. We camped around the West and thoroughly exploring Nebraska, following the Great Platte River road reading the diaries of the 1849 travelers. And yes, he thoroughly enjoyed sitting in a camp chair watching the sun set with a Manhattan his hand. He loved praying, reflecting & writing in his journal in the midst of nature.

We began working together in what we called the Campus Ministry group consisting of faculty members and their wives or husbands. We’d gather every 6-8 weeks for a mass or a camping event. We did many of their weddings, baptisms of their children. We joined their families on

our now mutual sacred journeys. At one time we had 9 chairpersons in the group, a nucleus working on mission and identity issues in the college.

One last story, Dick used to tease me for not thanking him enough for saving my life. Literally, he saved my life. He had talked me in to doing a 5 week course in Biblical archeology in Israel. After the course, we went to Athens, stood in St. Paul's footstep in the Forum where Paul preached. We proceeded to Skiathos, a Greek island, where I had a major accident. I slipped in the shower, caught myself on the towel handle which broke off, became a razor edge, and cut my right arm's brachial artery. Due to Dick's quick thinking in grabbing a bed sheet to make a quick tourniquet, he stopped the bleeding, and ran for help. Luckily, the help spoke English. They placed me in the bottom of a speedboat for the 45 mile trip across the Aegean Sea to a hospital in Volos where they gave me 10 units of blood, and sewed up the arm.

Dick, I want to publicly thank you.

The final leg of our sacred journey has been at Creighton during these last 8 weeks as my brothers and I did home hospice with Dick in his Room with a View. He loved praying and journaling each morning overlooking the Jesuit Gardens.

Each morning since he discovered he had inoperable cancer, his brothers in the community would stop by his room, often finding the wonderful nurse who cares for the Jesuits, Terry Kult, checking on him. We felt it was a privilege to make sure he had fresh ice water, and bringing him a cup a soup each evening.

In his room, Dick came to terms with dying, which he described so honestly in his last homily to his Renew group that met regularly for the

last 3 decades. At that Mass, he reflected on the gospel reading of the day, “Everyone who believes in Him will have Eternal Life,” He said, “My focus on finding God in this life is the right focus, but it hasn’t made me look forward to the next life.” He paused: “I like this life and I don’t want to die. Then reflected: “the spirituality I’ve been doing would be enhanced by a realization that this life is a prelude to the next life.”

The last week or so of Dick’s life, I’d walk in and he’d smile. I would tell him “your smile is beatific, and even made a photograph of him smiling and holding his cell phone with which he communicated with the world. He loved forwarding his last homily to friends, and scheduling visits from his many friends and former students. Last time I checked, his last homily had 7,000 views. He even said, “I am dying a very public death.”

About two weeks ago, I was working up the courage to suggest we need to start planning his funeral, when he said, I think we need to plan my funeral. And Chase Becker, Liturgist, came to his room planned the funeral, and St. John’s music director provided the music with the pieces Dick suggested. I would stop in his room to show him the program; he didn’t really want to see the final OBIT published in today’s mass program until his last week. Then he loved the mass program, and card. He had me insert “Golden Jubilee” on his card. He was so relaxed and at peace as he calmly and dispassionately discussed his funeral, personally inviting all of the Spiritual directors to do the prayers of the faithful, and each faculty member to be a pallbearer.

We shared Easter Sunday Mass in his room. On Easter Sunday, he was so at peace telling us he was looking forward to dying. His sister, Mary Jo, told him not to wait. It’s such an important message in hospice: the commission by family members to leave.. I repeated that message.

Easter Monday he was so frustrated, I think a little depressed because he no longer had any energy and complained all day. That morning he had also asked to be moved to Hospice. He wouldn't allow me wheel-chair him to the community chapel; he had no energy.

That Monday night when Greg O'Meara led us in the anointing prayers, I couldn't believe how energetic he was, filled with the Holy Spirit, and maybe a healthy dose of adrenalin, like he was in both videos, telling us all that he hoped he would die in his sleep. He was animated, telling jokes, and even teased me, saying I really don't believe in Purgatory, but Don might need some Purgatory before he gets to heaven. He even was a bit disappointed when everyone left to have dinner.

He and I watched the 1st half of the Final Four rooting for Villanova. At half time, he said I want to go to bed. Nurse Ann Laughlin came over to assist Dick get in bed, and he went to sleep.

And his wish was granted that night.

At the end of Dick's last homily, he asked a question that he often did in a dialog homily: *What occurs to you as we begin to think about our next life?*

For Dick, and for all of us, as we heard in today's reading from Isaiah:

*It is "our God. We look to him and he saves us."
Let us rejoice and be glad that he has saved us." (pause...)*

Dick's great gift is to remind us to always look to our God, to speak to the one who loves us so deeply and to find that Spirit in our hearts.

As Isaiah (and Dick) would say: let us rejoice and be glad that he has saved us!