

Evening prayer Vigil for Rev. John Joseph Kelly, O.S.A.

August 30, 2006

Chapel of St. Anthony
St. Thomas University
Miami Gardens, Florida

Homilist, Rev. Monsignor Franklyn M. Casale
President, St. Thomas University

Reading *Revelation 14: 13*

What we heard in this reading from the Book of Revelation is a basic simple tenant of our faith that the good that we do on earth matters. In some mysterious way it influences our eternal destiny. When we participate in any good work on earth we intimately participate also in the redemptive work of Christ. For the good that we do and because of the connection with the redemption of Christ, we one day achieve an eternal reward.

On earth we also continue the creative work of extending the mission of God's manifest love. We help to transform evil to good, sin to holiness, and dark to light. We are all called in baptism by the Spirit to his special grace for the task. Fr. Kelly surely believed in the basics and the fundamentals. He lived rigorously. There was little room to waver for him and his theology.

In addition to the grace of baptism, which we all receive associating us with Christ in the waters that wash away original sin, Fr. Kelly received an additional grace. The grace of the priesthood. That grace bestowed on him a unique identity. He became an "*Alter Christus*." He was intensely identified with Christ. He was as a person intimately identified as a priest. The priesthood was not just a symbol that he wore in putting on a habit, but it was part of his very soul and it was obvious to everyone who knew him. That is what endeared him to so many people. They did indeed see in him another Christ, in his zeal, his dedication, and in his unwavering loyalty to both his order and to the Master that he served.

Fr. Kelly gave his heart and his soul to people, especially the people of Chile, Peru, and Cuba, and they returned that love to him. He even called Spanish the "*lengua de mi Corazon*," which of course he spoke with a distinct Pennsylvania accent. It was his special joy, to bring Christ to the parishes in South America in this language, and to build a grand university in Cuba and also to teach in high schools in his other language, English, in the United States.

Because of his unique ability and his sharp intelligence he was entrusted many times by the Order with some delicate and challenging tasks, and he never wavered. If grace connects us to one another in Christ, then surely Fr. Kelly kept his connection strong. In whatever mission he was placed in the U.S. or in other places, people

remember him. The *Antiguos Alumnos* especially held him close. What he did for them at Villanueva served them so well when they were exiled from their beloved land to another place and those in Miami rallied around him, always as their priest.

Here in Miami, for the exile community, he was a beacon of hope and of course we all know that his fond desire was that one day there would be a restoration of freedom in Cuba, Catholic education and a rebuilding of Villanueva University.

On behalf of St. Thomas University, as its President, I express to the Augustinian Friars and to your whole community, gratitude for giving us the presence of Fr. Kelly here at St. Thomas University in Miami. We are very grateful for his presence. In the days when he was more vigorous he used to walk the campus mostly in his white Augustinian habit. He would engage the students. He would sit on the benches outside and of course he would chat with his friends in the library. I know that he was extremely pleased to be at the dedication of the Chapel of St. Anthony. Three months later he proudly participated when we dedicated the grand plaza of the Chapel, naming it the Plaza Kelly. Whenever there was an event at Plaza Kelly he would sit in the shade of the tree on the bench near the dedicated monument.

I was always personally grateful for his friendship and his encouragement. I know that he was very pleased with the progress of St. Thomas University, in some ways this was compensation for the end of the progress of the University in Cuba in 1961. St. Thomas University in Miami is a symbol of life that one day, in contrast to the shuttered doors of his beloved University in Cuba, could continue to teach young people in the Catholic tradition and in the spirit of St. Augustine under the auspices of the Archdiocese of Miami.