

KEVIN HEALEY MEMORIAL MASS HOMILY AT NOTRE DAME – MAY 3, 2009

Tom, Ann, Mary Kate, I know you have received piles of condolences of all kinds and I certainly want to add ours today, but I also want to just thank you for being here. Though you asked to have this celebration of Mass, I also know it was hard – hard to come as it will be hard to go – in the midst of so much chaos in your lives. And while you may find some comfort and consolation in this gathering, I suspect we are getting more from you being here because it allows us to gather as *we* need to in order to remember Kevin and celebrate his life among us.

I would also like to thank all of his friends who come in many guises: teachers, mentors, staff, members of this community; all of you from St. Ignatius who knew him even longer – you are a very impressive bunch; and, of course, his friends and roommates from Sorin. You always knew what to say and how to say it, how to watch over Kevin without making him self-conscious by watching too conspicuously. You were very fine shepherds in the way that you cared for him, and watching you do that was like seeing master violinists get every grace note just right. While I won't presume to speak on behalf of his parents and others who are grieving in any other way, I know that they are most grateful for the way you cared for him. Personally, I believe that if there is an eighth sacrament, it is friendship, and you were the ministers of it to him.

If I can continue on a musical note, you can learn a lot about people from looking at their Facebook pages, and I would certainly encourage those of you who might not have known Kevin as well to do so if you would like to know more about him and his interests. But one thing on there is a list of his favorite music groups. I don't know why it is, Tom and Mary Kate, that these guys still like our music. Maybe we knew more than we realized, or maybe they've found some meaning in it we didn't see. But first among Kevin's favorite groups on that page is the Beatles. It's not that I think Lennon and McCartney had any religious sentiments in mind, but when they wrote "When I find myself in times of trouble Mother Mary comes to me – and in my hour of darkness she is standing right in front of me, speaking words of wisdom," no lyricist or classical poet could have said it better because it was our mother Mary who Kevin turned to and kept in front of him his entire time at Notre Dame.

You see, after Kevin turned down Harvard, there was only one thing he asked for from us – to be in Sorin. He came to visit in June before his freshman year, and I was sure that a guy with a rod in his leg, hobbling on crutches, with a broken down immune system from chemo would take one look at our musty, moldy basement rooms with the dirty, cranky pipes overhead and bolt immediately for one

of the newer halls with A/C out there in the exurbs of the West Quad. The stairs, pipes, and crawling things didn't make much sense for someone in his condition, but Kevin's priority was to live at the point of a triangle nearly equidistant from the statue of the lady on the Dome and the other in a glowing niche at the Grotto that consoles many of us in our own darkest hours. He was wise to want to be close to her. It was what he needed, and he knew it better than any of us. He chose his own patch of ground where he planted his flag and fought his war against cancer from which he never retreated or surrendered. And whatever our boxers out there may think about it, he turned out to be the Braveheart in our midst, the toughest Otter I have ever known.

Aside from good health, a shot at foreign study programs, and all the opportunities anyone else has here, Kevin's battle was to just be a normal kid at Notre Dame. He wasn't a demanding one; he wasn't looking to be a popular one. He certainly wanted no special attention or treatment. He just wanted to be one of the flock. When he returned after spring break, he couldn't stand for a whole mass but insisted on climbing up into his loft at night rather than allow his roommates to rearrange the room for him. Sick as he was, Kevin was no whiner but was as low maintenance as any freshman – or for that matter any senior could hope to be. He so downplayed his condition I repeatedly fretted to his mom and to his RAs, over whether his hallmates were aware enough of what a slender thread his life hung by and whether we shouldn't be doing more to keep everyone in the loop. But she told me and Pat Reidy, his RA from last year, when we visited him at home last June that he had repeated that basic refrain to her before we arrived: "I just want to be the kid without cancer during the visit." He forbade her from administering any medication in our presence even though he needed it. And who among us wouldn't want that for any kid? Who among us wouldn't ask that for ourselves? Even Jesus prayed for the cup to pass by and how often did so many of us pray that Kevin would not have to drain that cup?

But while cancer was a persistent shadow in his life, Kevin worked to carve out precious moments of normalcy. During that same visit, his mom mentioned something she'd heard about simultaneously as I was thinking about it myself. Near the end of his first semester, I walked downstairs, midway between the first floor and basement, and halted. He was being giddy and directive, giving orders like a Prussian drill sergeant to his friends about exactly how they should be stringing the Christmas lights along the hallway. Others noticed it too. It was a sublimely simple moment, but it was apparent that he'd hit his stride and was delighting in being a normal, ordinary Otter. I relish that moment, seeing Kevin smiling, putting up decorations like a little kid, glad that he

had *arrived* after months of shuttling back and forth to Cleveland, and managed to achieve part of his dream.

We would all be very blessed to indulge and treasure those most ordinary of moments finding ways to spread a little joy, a sliver of the light of Christ that we celebrate officially once each year but that we are born to celebrate all the time every day – the light born of a young, simple woman who remained faithful and wise in her own suffering, by trusting in God the way we are asked to trust in Jesus, the one who cares for and shepherds us in ways of which we are often unaware. What Kevin went through these past two plus years was in no way ordinary, but it is a testament to his own holiness that he lived to remain so himself. What a Christ-like world we would have if all of us were so holy and humble taking wholehearted delight in those simple blessings.

It is always striking to me that Jesus at the final meal with his disciples called them not to be saints but to just remain in him as friends – easy to say, maybe as difficult to do as being saintly. But when all is said and done about why we are here – when we've put aside all the ambitions and career aims, intellectual and personal development, and institutional goals, it is precisely that the lady on the Dome wants the same thing – for all of us to be friends with her Son. Cancer prevented Kevin from adding much to his resume here aside from being a skit writer and actor for NDtv last year and a hall sacristan and altar server this year. That might not have impressed many corporate interviewers, but he was doing precisely what we are all here to do – to learn how to be a friend of Jesus, desiring nothing more than to serve him with every fiber of our being – or as Fr. Moreau said, to be not just citizens of society but citizens for eternal life.

In that sense, Kevin was the richest of all young men who gave up everything for the Christ who promises nothing: not riches, success, acclaim, health, nor ease, but whose great gift, difficult though it often is to perceive and appreciate, is to demand every last bit of us so that we become as much like him as possible. To live in faith is to believe that Christ's promise of nothing is the hope of everything. It is all Jesus' mother asked of Kevin and all she really asks us to *achieve* in this life. And so, whatever hours Kevin will miss living in the shadow of the Dome and radiance of the Grotto, this humble, stubborn warrior, brother, and son's triumph was that he was and remains a true friend of ours, of yours, and that true friend of wise Mary's son we are all called to be.