

The doorbell rarely rang at my house in those days, so I was surprised and delighted one afternoon to find two parishioners there, just back from a fishing trip. They gave me two freshly caught and filleted fish. Realizing I had an emergency on my hands, I called the only man who could help me on such short notice. I could almost see the twinkle in the eye of the old priest on the other phone. He said, "I'll be right up."

Among my happy memories of St. Regis were the conversations over meals I shared with Fr. James Lyons. We agreed on many points, and we disagreed on others. When we talked about homilies, for example, we both agreed they should be short. But I said, "A homily should always include some catechesis." He said, "No, a homily should never explain things."

Jim was a man of contrasts. He received the liberal promises of Vatican II like pure oxygen, yet he befriended his conservative peers. At St. Charles he developed lay ministry to record levels; at St. Regis his greatest joys were presiding and preaching at mass. He took an early retirement, but he was positively delusional about his health. "I'm fine," he'd say, but his health was terrible. We all wished he'd take better care of himself, but what did we know? He lived to be 83.

Jim found the sacred everywhere. He said in his book, "Little things mean a lot. The seemingly minor experiences of being loved and loving are our way of finding what is good in God's world." Jim could find the sacred in two filleted fish.

He reminds me of Simeon, the righteous and devout man, filled with the Holy Spirit, who saw two parents bring an infant into the temple one day. Most people looked on that scene as something ordinary, but Simeon saw something else. He found the sacred. He said, "Now, Lord, my own eyes have seen your salvation. Now, Lord, you can let me die." I think Fr. James Lyons taught us to say that prayer.