

There are many wonderful things to say about Fr. Bob Murphy. But I thought we'd save those for the funeral. I suspect he chose this gospel so I'd reflect on the theme, "Render to Murph the things that are Murph's." I've known this man for 28 years and my first memory of spending time with him was at his room in the seminary where he introduced me to a world I did not know. He served my first scotch. At the time he was five years older than I was. And he's still five years older than I am.

My freshman year at Conception Seminary people asked me, "Have you met Bob Murphy yet?" I said no. They said, "He's really funny." I'm sure they meant ha-ha funny. That's always been the way people described Murph. I used to think of funny people as shallow, empty-headed clowns. Especially after I met Murph. But the more I got to know him the more I observed something else. He was really very clever. He could mimic people's voices, their mannerisms, and their foibles. He knew all the great lines from all the great movies and had autographs by all the great actors who said them. He actually knew Bing Crosby and actually behaved like Jack Benny. He's smart around money and runs an honest, successful office. Don't be fooled by the cartoons on the walls. He is a citizen of DisneyWorld. He loves winter -- vacations in warm climates with sun and snorkle. He's profoundly loyal to his family. He has made and sustained close friendships, making people feel like they mattered in his life. The one who means the most to him is the one he calls "The Lord." Fr. Murphy talks with him intently and never makes an important decision without finding out first what the Lord wants.

Yet with all that personality, when people sum up Murph's character, they usually do it in the same way, "He's funny." Often, I think, we've missed it. We've been so delighted at our own laughter that we've overlooked how it got there. When Murph meets you he works very hard on you. He finds out what makes you laugh. He gets inside you because he's curious, because he loves you, and because he wants to make you happy. He is no thief who breaks and enters the human heart; he stands at the door, beguiles you, and you invite him in.

This is the man who 25 years ago gave his life in service to the priesthood and to the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph. During those years our diocese has been enriched by his preaching and bettered by his pastoral care. During those years he directed our vocation office, helping others open their hearts to a spirit of service. During those years he oversaw the reconstruction of a church building where people may gather to praise God for generations to come, long after the aforementioned funeral. It's not really the man we honor today; it's the service. It's the job he's doing. But this man has melded onto his job. He inhabits a world where fantasy, reality, and spirituality intersect, a colorful world of crazy characters, tears, and belief somewhere in the 1940s -- or perhaps in the age to come.

Vocation work has always been very important to Murph, because he perceives his own work so clearly as response to God's call. It hasn't always been easy for him, and he relies on our support more than we adequately know. I imagine what's in Fr. Murphy's heart today is the sentiment St. Paul expressed together with Silvanus and Timothy in his

first letter to the Thessalonians. The lines we heard today were the first ones ever written for the New Testament. They could be spoken by Fr. Murphy or by any of us who have had the privilege of serving as pastor. Paul writes, "We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. For we know, brothers and sisters beloved by God, that he has chosen you."

Fr. Murphy, we return the prayer. We rejoice that God has chosen you, and that you have chosen to remain our priest for twenty-five years. Thank you, and congratulations!