

SERMON 894

November 3, 2014

Commemoration of All Faithful Departed

970th Week as Priest

797th Week at St Dunstan's

62nd Week at Epiphany-Tallassee



A FISHER OF MEN

Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. AMEN.

Fisher Martin was born four years ago on September 5, 2010, and he died last Thursday evening, October 30, 2014, surrounded by his family and caregivers at Children's Hospital in Birmingham. He was the son of Dr. Chris and Kerriann Martin; the brother of Mary Elliott Martin, a second grader and the best big sister in the whole world; and the

grandson of Rick and Kathy Martin, Marian Martin, Jerry Sparks, and Tereesa Sparks. These are good people, folks whom my family has known for years.

I baptized Fisher *in extremis* when he was just two days old. The prophet Ezekiel said, “I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean.” Fisher was born with a broken heart, a missing chamber, and we didn’t know if he would survive the radical, pioneering surgery performed in Birmingham. But the work was a miracle and a great success. Remarkably, the tiny baby was given life. “A new heart I will give you,” said Ezekiel, “and a new spirit I will put within you.”

Fisher lived a good life with his family at Halawakee Creek Farm in Cusseta. He rode on the tractor with his daddy, and they checked on the cows, fed the fish in the pond, and threw rocks in the creek—a favorite pastime of every boy in the universe. He and Sissy liked swinging and playing outdoors together—and indoors they played with babies, read Pete the Cat books with their mommy, watched cartoons, and played Cars on an iPad. He was bright and happy, and happy to be alive. He loved cars, balls, the alphabet, colors, and counting. Fisher spent precious time at Mimi's house in Auburn.

The family made trips to Seagrove Beach, where Fisher played in the sand and sat in the surf as the waves lapped over him.

Those were good years for Fisher. Though he was only a little boy, he became a Fisher of Men and he cast his net far and wide to capture the hearts of many. I have known people who have lived a long life on this earth and have not the profound effect on others that Fisher had. In him were the fruits of the Holy Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control.

This boy suffered greatly, but he also endured. He became stronger and healthier, and we began to feel real hope for our Fisher of Men. He would be in the hospital many times over the next couple of years, but we knew this little boy was becoming a spiritual warrior. *His tenacious spirit and brilliant smile won us over, and we loved him fiercely.*

Then his mended heart began to weaken and fail him. The several surgeries had been helpful, but never a permanent solution. Fisher would need a new heart—and his mother and father and friends and family lived moment by moment, day by day, with the harrowing ordeal of awaiting a transplant.

The little boy and his family fought for health and life. It was a battle that few of us will ever know, a test of faith in God that we can only imagine. If we could have given him our hearts, given him health and long life and a future, any one of us would have done so—but the truth is that he already had our hearts, and we belonged to him. The poet E.E. Cummings wrote,

i carry your heart with me (i carry it in
my heart) i am never without it (anywhere
i go you go, my dear; and whatever is done
by only me is your doing)

Some people, hearing this story, will say that they cannot believe in a God who would let such a precious life end. They will doubt even the existence—much less the loving care—of a Savior who could not, or would not, save Fisher’s life. They may scoff at the thousands of prayers and petitions for Fisher’s healing as *unheard*—just words lost on the wind—or *unanswered*—cries for help scattered into a bleak and empty universe.

But this is not the case. If we understand that prayers for healing have more than one answer, and if we realize that these answers are given to us from a loving God, then we

discover that we are the ones who receive a new heart and a new spirit within us.

Healing may mean a physical cure—and Fisher received such a blessing at his birth and several times throughout his brief and most wonderful life. But healing may also mean coming to the end of your life with a sense of wholeness, of completeness. This was also Fisher’s experience and ours. We saw in his struggle our own desperate need for hope and faith in God. We witnessed in his innocence and trust and joy that which is best about all men and women and boys and girls. So our prayers were not ignored; they were fulfilled. The Fisher of Men captured us all in his net, and we will carry him in our hearts forever. E.E. Cummings wrote,

here is the deepest secret nobody knows
(here is the root of the root and the bud of the bud
and the sky of the sky of a tree called life; which grows
higher than soul can hope or mind can hide)
and this is the wonder that's keeping the stars apart
i carry your heart with me (i carry it in my heart)

The last time I saw Fisher was on his birthday, in the Cardiac Intensive Care Unit at Children’s. He was, as we say in my family, “Happy and Helpful and Hopeful.”

I said a prayer for healing, that Almighty God would heal Fisher with his grace, and strengthen him with his goodness, and surround Fisher and all of his family and friends with his loving care; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. And Fisher said, “Amen.” The Big Fish believed it. He held his hands together every time he prayed (like this), and at the Amen, he would clap his hands (like this).

So let’s say a prayer for Fisher, and let’s hold our hands together (like this).

Almighty God and Father, you are the source of all light and life. We give you thanks for the life of our Fisher of Men, and for the light that he has brought to our lives. We beg you to receive him into the courts of heaven and into your loving embrace. Give him once again—and give us as well—a new heart and a new spirit; this we ask in Jesus’ Name. **AMEN.**
(clap).

1,160 words