

THE PASSING OF A BROTHER

On April 27, I presided over the Funeral Mass of a very good man. He was my brother.

I remember his phoning some time ago, saying, "Can I ask you something?" My reply, of course, was, "Yes." He continued, "Would you have my funeral?" Surprised at the question, I made light of it by asking, "Sure; when is it?" Some time later, about two weeks before he died, he informed me in a matter of fact way, "It is time."

There were just the two of us, no other brothers or sisters. The thirteen and a half years that separated us necessitated that we become acquainted only later on in life. By the time that I was old enough to know what it meant to have a brother, he was drafted into the army for service in World War II, during which he married.

Edward had lung cancer. It was his decision not to seek medical intervention but to stay at home and continue living his life as long as the Lord would permit. Only for the last several days did he have to be confined to a bed. Having lived his Faith in the practical aspects of everyday living, he was well prepared to meet his God.

He had the gift of speaking with "kings and beggars" in exactly the same way, making no distinction in regard to how he related to them. I do not recall his ever criticizing another person, even when I thought that he had the right to do so. He would be the last to admit the good that he did for others. Nor did he consider as exceptional anything that he did. And, he did a lot, - in a quiet and unassuming way.

From the many examples of his Christian living, I would like to share with you two. He once rented one of his homes to a widow. There was never any delay on his part to take care of whatever needed to be taken care of when she called. At one point, the widow informed my brother that she could no longer afford the rent. His response was to lower her payments. That alone should get him into heaven!

Another one of the examples touches me personally. There came a time in his life when he could actually retire fulltime to Florida. He had been looking forward to that. Edward was ready to sign the papers for a house when I broke him the news that I had been named a bishop and would be moving out of state. I had not known about his intentions. Without hesitation, he set aside his impending plan and stayed in Michigan so that one of us would be close to our mother until the Lord took her to himself. Twenty years later, I continue to be grateful for that sacrifice and generous gesture of support.

If there is any place appropriate for a eulogy during a funeral, it is the wake service. There, in an informal and familial atmosphere, family and friends can share memories and make expressions of gratitude for the presence of the loved one that is being entrusted to the Lord. Edward's family and friends did just that. It was cathartic.

Thank you for the many expressions of condolences and prayers, including the promise of masses. Know that you have been a great source of comfort to me. May the Lord be good to a very good man!