

A Tribute to a Great Man – Fr. Joe Andres

Fr. Joe Andres was a man who gave his whole life to service of others. He touched thousands of lives. Imagine how many weddings, funerals, and baptisms he performed. He was the pastor at several different parishes and helped out at many others during his 60 years as a priest. But it was our parish, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish, where he felt a special bond. We were so blessed with his presence for so many years.

One of the attributes of Fr. Joe that stood out to most people was his sense of humor. He always had a joke and a quick come back to anything said. It was amazing how fast his mind worked. Sometimes his humor took people off guard – was he joking or serious? How many times did he say he was dying or the next time we would see him would be at Evans (funeral home). Fr. Joe enjoyed being a people person. He told me once that he knew Helen Steiner Rice (the poet), that they corresponded, and that she had heard some of his sermons and that he had inspired her. Yeah right Fr. Joe. I did not believe him. Show me some proof. (He enjoyed pulling our legs.) The next week he brought me two letters that she had written to him. I made copies and still have them. I reread them to him when he was at Mercy St. Theresa. He asked me to keep them as he had lost the originals. She talks about how his letters helped her. I wish I had copies of his letters, but again what an example of touching someone. She was able to send him some donations that helped him to help others in need in his parish.

I was honored to be able to read the chapters that Fr. Joe had completed of the story of his life. It was a project that he never got to finish. After I would read a chapter, we would sit and discuss it. The main thrust of each chapter, in my opinion, was Fr. Joe showing us how the small things that we do can significantly impact other people. Most of us will never make a great discovery or be a famous person, but we all can by our actions make a big impact. In a lot of the examples Fr. Joe used, the person did not realize how much what they considered a small act, meant to someone else. Sometimes it was what he did for others and sometimes it was what was done for him. In his early days as a priest he was sent out to Vera Cruz, Ohio, which was at the time a very rural and somewhat poor area. Fr. Joe would drive around rounding up children and taking them to catechism. He made some converts, but what he said was the most important thing that he did was improve the relations of the Catholics (who were looked down upon) and the rest of the community. He did that by service. Even though he was a priest and a very holy man, he did not put himself above others.

Fr. Joe enjoyed life and he enjoyed people. He had an interesting hobby of building model ships, sometimes inside bottles. It was very intricate work and took many hours to complete. He also was a huge sports fan and enjoyed watching and talking about local sports teams. (Have you heard the Reds won't be serving beer this year at the stadium? Why not? They lost the opener.) After he "retired," he was helping out at three parishes on the weekends and occasionally morning Mass and he visited hospitals every week. He very much enjoyed being independent and when he had to go into Mercy St. Theresa it was very hard for him.

He put up with a lot of pain in his later years that he always offered up. We all are better people for having known Fr. Joe, for him touching our lives, for leading by understated example. Thanks Fr. Joe for the blessing that you were to us. Thanks for your life of giving, for your wonderful touching sermons (even though you would say you had a bumner of a sermon that day), for your acts of kindness, for your sense of humor. You were a great man, a holy man, and a friend to all. You will be greatly missed. We take comfort from knowing that you are finally in heaven, enjoying perfect joy in God's presence after dedicating your life to Him. We love you and will always be grateful for having been blessed to know you. In closing a quick prayer that was one of Fr. Joe's favorites ~ "Sacred Heart of Jesus – I place my trust in You."

Peggy Roundtree