

Feast of All Saints/All Souls
St. Joseph's Neier
Rev. Kevin Schmittgens

November 1-2, 2014

Central Idea: Praying for and reflecting on the lives of others who have gone before us, deepens us and helps us grow into the people the Lord wants us to be.

At first glance, the film *St. Vincent* might not seem to be a great Catholic film, but I believe it is. The Bill Murray movie is about a person who is flawed, sinful, and, apparently, this is the standards for sanctity in our popular culture right now, not very nice. (not to give anything away, but he cannot even pray "Grace" at the end of the movie – actually a fairly funny bit.) But looks are deceiving. The character of Vincent, imperfect as he is, and he is *very* imperfect, has qualities that are not only noble and virtuous, but, dare I say it, downright saintly.

The film got me to think about the people in my life whose lives were far from the ideal, but whose existence and whose spirit impacted me and impacted my vision of where God wants me to be. I have picked four, from my 31 years as a priest. I purposely picked individuals NOT from this parish, although some of you may know their stories. And, I don't want to be sexist here, these examples are all male. That is not to say that all the women whose funerals I presided at were either saintly or not very good examples, it is just how this all played out. Finally, these are not in chronological order. So deal with it.

Kurt Brueggemann, died September of 1999. Some of you may be aware of Kurt's story, and some of you may even be related. I decided to start with him, because his may be the most difficult and problematic. Kurt was a parishioner of mine from St. John's Gildehaus. One night, Kurt and some of his friends were, as young people are wont to do, messing around at night. The precise nature of their actions is not important, all that is important is that (and this is safe to say) he was doing things and he was in places he should not have been. The story is a bit muddled here, but what happened isn't. Kurt running away jumped off a railroad viaduct. The force of the impact when he landed, as you might expect, killed him. (I won't go into the details.) The thing I remember the most about Kurt's wake is the anger of many of his friends. "How could he have been so stupid?" "Why did he do this?" "I can believe he did that!" The anger was understandable. *It was* a stupid act. However, Kurt's death taught me two infinitely valuable lessons. I learned that I, at times, was no different than Kurt. I have done reckless things. I was in places (metaphorically speaking) where I should not have been. I just got lucky. I just away with it. That understanding helped me deal with Kurt's senseless death. Second, I learned that we should not judge the totality of someone's life by one single act. Kurt was more than a dumb mistake. Kurt was more than that fatal jump. Kurt was more.

Mark Bornholdt. Died July of 1991. Mark was the brother of one of my best friends. Because I was a friend of his sister and his family, I was Mark's friend as well. Mark

always was kind and friendly to me. There was much, however that I did not know about Mark. I did not know, for instance, that he was gay and it was only after he died that I found out about his deep and painful grief over the death of his friend and partner. His friend had been dying of AIDS. The friend's death was ugly and difficult. It was also a long and torturous process. AIDS is brutal. But this torturous process was also, ironically, a process of spiritual regeneration, for before his succumbed to that terrible illness, his friend had decided to convert to Catholicism and be received into the church. Sadly, about two weeks after his friend and companion had died; Mark in his grief, took an overdose of sleeping pills and died. Mark's family, whom I love very deeply, asked me to do the service at the cemetery, which I did and did gladly. Later, Mark's mother, in a moment alone with me, told me how comforting it was for me to be there. Mark's lifestyle choice must have been a challenge to her, but he was still her son and having the Church there meant so much. Knowing Mark and knowing his story, changed me. The church needs to be there for her children, no matter what. Right now as a church we are struggling with it. Some are horrified that we even bring up the subject. Some are heartened that we are finally reaching out to a community we have long shunned and ignored. As I personally work through this issue, I will always think about praying at Mark's graveside and realizing that is exactly where I needed to be, for Mark, for his family and for myself.

William Laub Died September of 2008. St. Monica is the patron of long-suffering parents, but Bill might just be up there as well. Bill was a cop, a police chief, a father and a grandfather. I knew him as a grandfather because he was the grandfather of my nephew's wife, Michelle. Let me just say that Michelle is one of my favorite people and the reason for that just might be Bill. You see, Michelle's mom, Bill's daughter was a bit of a mess. I say "was" because she died three years ago of an overdose at a relatively young age. I am not telling stories out of school by saying that Michelle's mom lived a chaotic life. Bill took over as Michelle's parental unit and it was his guidance, his support and his love which helped Michelle through the chaos. I really liked Bill. I liked playing golf with him. I liked his attitude. I liked who he was for Michelle. But I think that deep down Bill had a pain, a pain that he may have failed his daughter. He was a man of action, but one of the people closest in his life he could not help or save. The lesson of Bill's life is as difficult and as painful as for Kurt's and Mark's, sometimes, despite our best actions and intentions, things simply do not work out.

Duane Haddox Died June of 2010. It is disturbing when someone you worked with on a daily basis, a colleague, dies suddenly. It really only happened once and Duane was the man. Duane was the Dean of Students at Borgia, but he was so much more than that. He was a brother, a son, a husband, a father. But what I remember most about Duane is that he was a coach. The term *coach* has a spotty pedigree. Like some priests, some coaches have given the term a negative connotation. For some people, coach is a derogatory term for a person who is probably not all that bright, but is good at sports. But for me there are two terms of great warmth and respect. One is boss. (it is weird thinking that I may not

be using that for awhile). The other is coach. We have some awesome coaches at Borgia and in our area, and Duane was one of the finest I've known. He coached soccer, but that only scratched the surface of what he truly coached: LIFE. Duane's lesson was twofold: life is hard, the game is hard, practice is hard and the second lesson, *you* are a machine. In other words, you are tougher than you think, you are stronger than you know. This is not just a bunch of "macho mumbo jumbo, boys don't cry" nonsense. No, it is much more real, much more potent, much more vital. With the strength that comes from God, you can do amazing things. This doesn't mean that we are unemotional; that we should not be empathetic and compassionate, it simply means that God gives us the wherewithal to face any situation with courage, with endurance, with strength, and with hope. Duane Haddox, in his own way, taught me that.

And that is the true message of these days of All Saints, All Souls. The writer Oscar Wilde once said: Every saint has a past, every sinner has a future. If you know anything about Wilde, you know what he is talking about. That is theme of the film *St. Vincent*. That is the message of the lives of Kurt, Mark, Bill and Duane.

That is what we celebrate today.