

(Sermon delivered at the funeral of Mr. Frank M. Folsom, St. Patrick's Cathedral, New York City, January 16, 1970, by the Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C., President, University of Notre Dame)

I appreciate more than I can say the generosity and sensitivity of Terence Cardinal Cooke, the Archbishop of New York, in inviting me to say these few words at the Funeral Mass we are celebrating for our dear friend, Francis Marion Folsom.

It is given to every human being to deliver at least one sermon. Strangely enough, this sermon is mainly delivered after one has departed this life. People stop and think for a moment of the dear departed one. All that was for so long taken for granted suddenly comes into focus. And there, all bound up in a fleeting moment, is the totality of a person's life.

Each of us came here today to pray that the good Lord give to Frank Folsom the great blessing of eternal life. And, to each of us, Frank Folsom today gives his brief and powerful sermon, the sermon of his life.

Saint Thomas once wrote that the measure of a successful Christian life is to know truly what to have faith in, what to hope for, and what to love. Look at each of these and you have the measure and meaning of Frank Folsom's life -- the theme of his sermon to us, as I see it.

When Frank stood at his mother's death bed, she had a simple charge for him: "Never forget that you are an Irishman and a Catholic." He never did.

The last thing I saw him do, less than a week ago, was to make the sign of the Cross feebly, yet firmly, and to wrap the Rosary around his wrist so that it would not fall off when he slipped off into oblivion, as he did shortly thereafter.

I cannot remember all the times and places he served my Mass and received Holy Communion with great devotion: in Rome and Vienna, in Madrid and Munich, in Paris and Tokyo, and, of course, here in New York. And when we drove through the countryside abroad, he always started the day by reciting the Rosary; he leading, I driving. When we were almost killed one day in the Alps by a wild bus driver who wanted more than three quarters of the road, Frank never flickered an eyelash. "Someone's watching us", he said calmly. He believed it. So did I, especially after that closest of calls, right after completing the Rosary.

Frank's was a simple faith, like his mother's, but again deeply penetrating. We were close enough to the Church's operation on the things we were doing together to see many of the human imperfections of the operation -- but he used to reassure even me, saying, "Don't let's mix up the human and the divine, God's grace and what human beings do to neglect it, God's word and how poorly we follow it". He knew many Popes, more Cardinals than most Catholics know priests, Archbishops, Bishops, Monsignori, and priests without number. Though he loved them all, some more than others, they were not the substance of his faith.

He was relaxed about having been awarded about every honor the Church has to give. He only wanted to serve, and serve he did, in every way he knew how, with all the energy and all the considerable talent he could summon, without looking for anything for himself. And when he came home at night in some foreign land and emptied out his pockets, I was always edified to see a much worn Rosary and a blue Rosary Novena booklet that had more mending scotch tape than paper for a cover. He would kneel down and confess to a good friend like a child, which he was not, because in his faith he was talking about his faults to God through the mediation of a priest, asking mercy and forgiveness and promising to do better. He loved a sermon on Sunday, even if he was the only one at Mass in some far corner of the world.

I have heard him speak the truth to Popes and Cardinals when the truth was difficult to say and flattery and evasion would have been much easier, but less honest.

He had an instinct about the faith and its meaning for life, his life and the life of the Church. In these difficult changing days, he somehow always managed to land on his feet, to take the long view, to avoid disillusionment and frustration, and to see the positive good in change. He was a builder rather than a destroyer, a man for growth rather than decline, a doer in the middle of the action rather than a sideline critic.

This was all part of his faith in his Irish heritage. While perceptive in mind, his real talent was of the heart. He had a great feel for the human situation and there are thousands across the world

who have felt the warmth of his greeting, the bounty of his limitless generosity, the thoughtfulness of his gifts, the understanding and affection of his great heart.

He had an abiding faith in human beings, even though he sensed with the Irish poets and songsters that human beings will often break your heart. Like all good Irishmen, he knew the heights and the depths of human feeling, the great joys and the deep sorrows, the wild triumphs of soaring success and the lonely anguish of personal failures. But those great eternal realities that claimed his deepest faith kept him on course through time to eternity, and he always knew deep down that he would some day come to a final harbor of light, refreshment, and peace, as we pray in the Mass today.

On the human side, his greatest faith was in the abiding reality of his family and friends. In this regard, his two favorite sayings were, "Nothing changes" which was his personal version of "Semper fidelis" -- always be faithful; and "Everyone must belong to someone and something". I have never known anyone who worked harder at making his family and his friends know that he really and truly belonged to them.

His dear wife, Gladys, was his anchor while she lived. His girls and boys were his light of life; a light went out when one of the boys was killed in World War II. The only thing he loved more than his grandsons were his granddaughters, and each new great grandchild was a special treasure to be specially loved and cherished.

Speaking as a special friend of his, I will candidly admit that the only person on earth who bragged about me more shamelessly and with less regard for truth than Frank was my mother.

His friends were endless, of every religion, of every nation, of every race, of every class, of every profession. He amassed them with abandon, from Pope to pauper, and loved them all as only an Irishman can. He was, as all of us are, accused of many things in his lifetime, but never of being without faith and never, never of being unloving. Where family and friends, Church and country, good causes and human hopes were concerned, his only measure of love was to love without measure.

What did he hope for? Certainly, he hoped first for only the best for his girls and boys and their sons and daughters, and for his friends. He hoped for the best, too, for his Church and his country, both of which he served so well in so many ways. For himself, his only real hope was to be at the right place at the right time so that he might serve, and build, and be a positive influence for good.

If you asked him what was his greatest accomplishment as chief executive of a great corporation, it was not its phenomenal growth under his leadership in the post-war years, but the fact that he had inaugurated a generous pension plan that would greatly benefit its thousands of employees now and in the future.

It is a long road from the small rural towns of Sprague and McMenville in the great Northwest to San Francisco, Sacramento, Chicago, Washington, Philadelphia, and, finally, New York. But here he was finally

at home, in this great Cathedral with an Irish Patron Saint, with a Cardinal-Archbishop named Spellman who for twenty-five years and more was a true brother to him, with the great charities of this Archdiocese, with the Knights and Ladies of the Holy Sepulchre whom he loved so well, especially the ladies, with a long list of other great endeavors centered here in the religious and secular world of New York.

A few days before Cardinal Spellman's death, Frank tried to give him an accounting of one such endeavor that the Cardinal was sponsoring and Frank was leading. The Cardinal kindly shut him off by saying, "Frank, I'm tired, and besides I know that everything you've done has been done with style, and integrity, and efficiency. If you must account to me, let it ride for awhile, and some day soon enough we'll get off together in a quiet corner of heaven and get all the accounts straightened out and squared away". If they haven't done it already, I am sure they will do it soon.

In simple terms, reflecting great realities, these are the life lines of Frank Folsom: what he had faith in, what he hoped for, what he loved. This is his sermon to all of us. I cannot tell it to you without sharing with you how I know he would have reacted to the telling -- even this simply.

Since 1957, Frank and I have spent the better part of a year of our lives together representing three Holy Fathers in an endeavor called the International Atomic Energy Agency -- Atoms for Peace. Frank was a very lonesome man in 1957, since his wife had died the year before.

This new endeavor gave him an outlet for new faith and hope and love. Without any training in diplomacy or science, he became a perceptive and persuasive apostle for the peaceful uses of atomic energy, and a diplomat who persuaded even the Russians in those days that peace was possible if faith and hope and love could be allowed to flourish between us. When a high Church dignitary accused him of being soft on Communism, he quoted St. Matthew: "Love your enemies. Do good to them that hate you".

No one will ever know how the power of his faith and hope and love mediated peace during a precarious and difficult period of history, and how much the more hopeful signs of today result quite directly from those efforts in darker days. But his faith begot faith, his hope engendered hope, and his very real love attracted those without much faith or hope and endeared them to what he stood for.

Late at night in Vienna, after writing up the results at the end of a difficult conference, I would sit in Frank's room and read to him the text of our report for his approval. At the end, he would smile and say, "You make me look better than I am". I'm afraid that is what he would say again today.

All I can say is that his life speaks for itself to all of you. His faith and hope and love speak for themselves. And because human words are always inadequate in describing human deeds, especially human deeds at their noblest, I must admit that the sermon of his life is better than I have portrayed it. Despite any disclaimer he would

make, you and I know that the good Lord will be good to him in eternity because he was so good to so many of us in the days we enjoyed together. May the good Lord grant us more like him, and may Frank Folsom rest in peace eternal.