

(Eulogy delivered by the Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C., President, University of Notre Dame, at a Memorial Mass for Richard Tucker, St. Patrick's Cathedral, New York City, October 14, 1975)

On behalf of His Eminence, Terence Cardinal Cooke, who is offering this Memorial Mass, and especially on behalf of the family of Richard Tucker, his dear wife, Sara, and his sons, Barry, David, and Henry, I welcome all of you, his friends, to this memorial service in the great Cathedral of Saint Patrick, in the great City in which Richard was born, grew up, performed as few others have, so well and so long and so thrillingly, and where so sadly last January he was laid to rest after a heartrending service at the Met in Lincoln Center.

To the casual observer, this must seem to be a very unusual occasion: to have a Memorial Mass offered by the Cardinal Archbishop of New York in thanksgiving for the talents of a deceased Jewish opera star in this great Cathedral, with a eulogy preached by the President of the University of Notre Dame.

All I can say to you, my friends, is that this great man whom we remember so fondly today was a very unusual person. The unusual was the story of his life. The son of poor Bessarabian immigrants, Richard began singing at the age of six in the Allen Street Synagogue on the lower East Side. He was later a drop-out from Brooklyn's New Utrecht High School, to work at every manner of odd jobs so that he could earn enough money to pay for his voice lessons. He was no drop-out in his goal to become a great cantor, which goal he soon

achieved at the Brooklyn Jewish Center. But there was yet another goal, one he had never even dreamed about until Paul Althouse, a great former Metropolitan Opera tenor, induced him to use his obvious talents to "sing unto the Lord a new song" in the great themes of Puccini and Verdi.

How unusual it was for an unknown young cantor to step onto the stage of the Metropolitan Opera in January of 1945 as Enzo Grimaldi in "La Gioconda" and to bring down the house in one of those great spontaneous bursts of applause that recognize the promise of genius. Even more unusual, this budding young star had never even been in the Met before that day to hear and see an opera! In a field dominated by the great Caruso, here was a young American, trained here in the city of his birth, where he was to become the greatest tenor alive, and now in memory. Who could have thought on that freezing January night of 1945 that he would still be performing at the height of his powers thirty years later, a feat only achieved by two of his predecessors in the ninety year history of the Metropolitan Opera.

I remember well the night of his twenty-fifth anniversary when I had the <sup>unique</sup> ~~unusual~~ pleasure of escorting his beloved Sara to that unusual anniversary performance with Joan Sutherland as his Traviata, Leontyne Price as his Aida, and Renata Tebaldi as his Gioconda. I felt in the presence of unusual musical magic that evening as Sara enthusiastically bravoed each magnificent performance as though it

were his debut and she a young bride. Twenty-five years melted away before their ardor and love for each other.

Another unusual facet of Richard's life goes back to the very beginning of his singing. He promised his mother, as only one can promise a Jewish mother, that despite fame and fortune, he would never give up his work as an ordained cantor. Accordingly, he passed up all opera and concert engagements twice a year to return to the ministry for the Jewish High Holy Days and the traditional Spring Passover Seder Services. He was in passing years to perform these services all over the world, most poignantly in Israel in 1963 at the great Synagogue in Tel Aviv. His religious commitment overflowed as he sang to help the Cardinal launch the annual charity drive, or when he touched the nation by singing "Panis Angelicus" from the choir loft of this Cathedral during the funeral services of Robert Kennedy.

Perhaps the most private memory of this unusual man was that of his three sons who often heard him chant the Kiddush with the traditional blessings of the bread and wine as their mother lit the sabbath lights. You will hear echoes of these lovely blessings in the Offertory prayers of the Mass today.

Blessed art Thou, O Lord, our God, King of the Universe, who bringeth forth bread from the earth.

Blessed art Thou, O Lord, our God, King of the Universe, who createst the fruit of the vine.

It reminds us that Mass was first offered at a Seder in Jerusalem.

Ten years ago, when one of our University Trustees, Alfred Stepan, wrote me to suggest that we confer an honorary doctorate of Fine Arts on this unusual man, he alleged four simple, but telling reasons. In his own words:

Richard Tucker is the best husband I know.

Richard Tucker is the best father I know.

Richard Tucker has the greatest talent for friendship of any man I know.

And lastly, Richard Tucker is the best tenor I know.

Perhaps in another very unusual way, that list best expresses the priorities that long characterized Richard Tucker's life. Sara and the boys, and the grandchildren, too, can attest to the first two. Who could count the tens of thousands who were touched by his warm friendship? You saw long lines of them standing outside the Met last January to bid him a fond farewell. They came from all over the world to fill the great red and gold palace of lyric art. They poured out words of grief in all the languages in which he sang so powerfully and so beautifully: Italian, French, Hebrew, German, English. They represented every class from the highest to the lowest, for everyone was important to Richard -- he had been on all levels of life himself. His friends' hearts were touched by the simple service, Isaiah and the psalms he loved, the eulogy by the Chicago Rabbi whom he had helped so often at Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, and the words of Cardinal Cooke; his good friend, "Praise Richard Tucker, a man totally dedicated to the full and

generous use of a voice and a marvelous talent that the good Lord had given him." His friends could hardly believe that this was the end of over 700 performances in New York and on tour in thirty different roles.

It is typical and not unusual that the end found him in Kalamazoo that day last January, doing what he loved to do: despite a busy day of travel, practice, and performance, he found time to audition and counsel a young operatic aspirant -- as Paul Althouse had once counselled him, so many years before.

Last June, on the tenth anniversary of Richard Tucker's receiving the honorary doctorate at Notre Dame, we had planned to have a quiet Mass there with Richard and Sara and, hopefully, the sons, to commemorate that happy family anniversary -- joys were always a family affair for Richard. Well, God chose otherwise, so we have a more splendid, albeit sad, memorial Mass for Richard and his family here today.

There is a beautiful prayer in the Jewish religious tradition called the "Mourner's Kaddish," a prayer redolent of the promise of resurrection and the assurance of immortality. As Rabbi Joseph Hertz's authorized Daily Prayer Book explains it:

"The Kaddish prayer is daily recited by hundreds of thousands of old and young, rich and poor, learned and ignorant, throughout the world. The tenderest threads of filial feeling and recollection are entwined about

this prayer. Even those Jews who are lax and indifferent in religious observance deem it a sacred act of reverence towards their departed father or mother to say Kaddish every day for a year and then one day a year, on the Yahrzeit -- (the memorial day).

"Thus is the Kaddish a bond strong enough to chain earth to heaven. It keeps the living together, and forms the bridge across the chasm of the grave to the mysterious realm of those whose bodies sleep in the dust, but whose souls repose in the shadows of the Almighty. It teaches our soul to cling in trust and hope to One Whose decree obtains in the daily happenings of our individual lives as well as in the larger destinies of mankind, nay, of the universe. This (Kaddish) prayer, in short, is the thread in Israel that binds the generations 'each to each in natural piety' and makes the hearts of parents and children beat in eternal unison." (p. 269-71)

Thus spoke Dr. Hertz, the late Chief Rabbi of the British Empire.

For us, the living beneficiaries of the rich and unusual life of Richard Tucker as husband, father, friend, and tenor, may I suggest that in your hearts you join me as I recite this ancient prayer for Richard Tucker who did so much for all of us.

Mourner's Kaddish

Mourner -- Magnified and sanctified be his great Name in the world which he hath created according to his will. May he establish his kingdom during your life and during your days, and during the life of all the house of Israel, even speedily and at a near time, and say ye, Amen.

Cong. and Mourner -- Let his great Name be blessed for ever and to all eternity.

Mourner -- Blessed, praised, and glorified, exalted, extolled and honoured, magnified and lauded be the Name of the Holy One, blessed be he; though he be high above all the blessings and hymns, praises, and consolations, which are uttered in the world; and say ye, Amen.

May there be abundant peace from heaven, and life for us and for all Israel; and say ye, Amen.

He who maketh peace in his high places, may he make peace for us and for all Israel; and say ye, Amen.