

(Eulogy delivered by the Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C., President, University of Notre Dame, at the funeral of Dr. George N. Shuster, Sacred Heart Church, Notre Dame, Indiana, Friday, January 28, 1977)

"Whoever lives and believes in Me will never die."

These simple reassuring words of Jesus to the grieving Martha are our best consolation today as we gather in this holy place to bid goodbye to an old friend and associate and to pray powerfully in the Mass for the repose of his noble soul.

The difference between those who truly believe in Our Lord and those who do not is that believers live in hope of eternal life, and it keeps them traveling Godward through the long, tiring, and trying days of their lives which are also lived in love.

What do we really learn from the long life of this great and gentle man to whom we bid goodbye today? What did he really have faith in, hope for, and love?

Those of us who were privileged to work with him and know him well were strengthened in our own faith just by being with him, watching him, listening to him. His faith was a rock to which his life was anchored, a North Star keeping him on the right path through life, an inspiration that was evident in everything he did. In the words of the Gospel, he was the faithful servant of everything that was good.

I first met George Shuster, spiritually, in one of his books which I read in a garret room on Via dei Cappuccini in Rome.

The book was "The Catholic Spirit in English Literature." I still remember, across all those forty years, that the book was bound in red covers and, between them, I found a luminous mind at work, faith finding new beauty in old masterpieces, all expressed in a style that was the man: direct and beautiful, ^{humane} and uplifting.

With the curiosity of the young, I learned soon enough that he had come to Notre Dame as a student from Wisconsin and had majored in the classics and graduated in 1915. The first World War took many of his friends to an early grave and while he was in the thick of trench warfare in France, all ^{the} were interested in keeping him alive because he was one of the few who understood German, and by listening to the German artillery, ^{at the} he could tell our troops where to expect the next awful barrage.

Thank God, he was spared because he had, in the Providence of God, long miles to go and many promises to keep before he could now sleep in peace. Returning to Notre Dame after the war, he found three treasures that were to shape his future life: a deepened love of literature and teaching that led him to a Master's degree and a deep desire for a doctorate, the grail that he pursued for twenty years until he finally achieved it at Columbia University in 1940, when he also became President of Hunter College in New York. The second treasure he found at Notre Dame was to discover his talent for writing and editing. That led him quickly to ^{the writing of} his first of over twenty books and to helping edit the Ave Maria with Father Daniel Hudson.

The third treasure he found at Notre Dame was a Summer School student named Doris Cunningham whom he married in 1924 and loved faithfully until the day he died.

I should like to let George tell you this story in his own words, as we find them in the concluding paragraph of his autobiography, published the year he came to Notre Dame for the third time fifteen years ago:

"I should like to close quite sentimentally by talking about the light in my own house. More years ago than it is consoling to remember, I was teaching during a Summer at Notre Dame. A girl stood under what they call the 'Golden Dome,' with a little gold ornament on her throat and a light in her eyes. Some time later we were married. We took many things more or less in stride. A few of them were very hard to take. There is no reason why I should talk about them here other than that we stood our ground together. Perhaps a little of our buoyancy rubbed off in the process. But I believe we managed somehow to keep our chins up and whistle in the dark. A good many things never came our way which it would have been pleasant to see come. Then there were the twenty-one years at Hunter. That many years is a long time, but no doubt ever arose that we accepted them together, loyally and with affection. It is often said that a wife is the shadow of her husband, or that a husband is the shadow of his wife. That is not true of us. We made one shadow, and for it I am in this place saying thanks." May he be allowed to say it again today, at this time and in this place, before this altar where a few years ago George and Doris happily celebrated their Golden Wedding Anniversary together.

George inscribed this book for me with the words -- "An account of the sinful past of your more or less obedient servant." It was anything but sinful. They should call Hunter, Shuster College, because he made it great just by being there and bringing in his friends who were legion besides being also great.

He brought with him to Hunter twelve years experience of editing the Commonweal, a fledgling Catholic journal that launched the Catholic laity into a new and better American Catholic experience. He brought the first American voice to expose the growing horror of Hitler and Nazism. From there, he sallied forth^{* Rome, Italy} to launch the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural organization, on whose Executive Board he represented our country in UNESCO's better years. On leave from Hunter, he served brilliantly as Land Commissioner for post-war Bavaria, giving that Catholic land the first understanding and compassion it had received in many years. Upon retiring from Hunter in 1960, he had the golden opportunity of going wherever he wished in the world, for whatever he cared to do, with fat foundation support. Notre Dame about that time awarded him our highest honor, the Laetare Medal, which he richly deserved, and in the euphoria of that moment, I asked him to return here for the third time, not to retire, but to assist me in the revitalization of the humanities and social sciences and to help create here the kind of urbane, sophisticated, and intelligent Catholic life of which he was, to my knowledge, the best personification.

His last fifteen years here are known to many of you, and to me, to our great profit. While others his age sought their ease, he realized our hopes and his, with unrelenting labors.

My favorite picture of him is at luncheon each day in the Morris Inn, with faculty and students, young and old, loving and encouraging them and becoming, in turn, greatly beloved by all who grew spiritually, intellectually, and humanly by his careful and painstaking nurturing. He even enjoyed a dry Manhattan and a denicotinized cigarette while doing it. Joie de vivre, the French call it.

God only knows how many crises I and others brought to him, as to a Father Confessor, who listened sympathetically and always gave wise counsel. Like a good gardener, he brought out the best in us, all the beauty and goodness that we did not know we had until he discovered and encouraged it in us. While he was a quintessential layman in a rather clerical church, I always saw in him a priest, a mediator who stood between ignorance and learning, badness and goodness, promise and fulfillment, always bridging the gap, always leading upward.

I know a once dreary Catholic university in South America that is bright and shining today because he cared enough to go there often, with great personal sacrifice, and to show them the way. I know of discouraged and defeated scholars who came to life

because he beckoned the way to do it and gave them a gentle push. I know so many students who were losing faith, not only in God, but everything else, who found in his staunch and unwavering faith the means of recovering their own. As an educator, they are perhaps his best monument. I know of frustrated priests who were ready to call it quits until he opened to them new and exciting vistas. I know many young and old members of this community today who instinctively call him Father, and I am one of them. He engendered faith and hope and love because he lived to the fullest these great virtues that lead us to God.

There is a wonderful line in the prayers for the dying -- "Go forth Christian soul to meet your Savior and Lord." It seemed almost superfluous to say that to George in his final hours. He spent his whole life doing it. It was the substance of his faith and hope and love, ~~both for us, as well as for God.~~ He found the good Lord everywhere, sought and served Him everywhere, found Him in us and in our hopes, left us so much better because of this deep faith and hope and love that he lived among us.

When the history of American Catholicism's coming of age in our times is written, George Shuster will emerge as a giant actor on the scene. How fortunate we were that he ^{came} came so long ago to this place that he learned to love, that he returned for new discoveries and new loves after World War I, ^{that} that in the ripeness of age, wisdom, and grace, he came a third time to enrich us all.

"Whosoever lives and believes in Me will never die."

Although we are small compared to the cosmic reality of eternal life, I know I speak for all of you when I say that as long as there is a cherished spot called Notre Dame, there will be a cherished spirit here called George Shuster. May we grow here in faith and hope and love as he did, and may he now rest in peace and joy eternal.