

(Homily delivered by the Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C., President, University of Notre Dame, at the funeral of Rev. John J. Cavanaugh, C.S.C., Sacred Heart Church, December 31, 1979)

We are gathered here on this last day of the seventies and the eve of the eighties to pay our final respects to one of the all-time great men of Holy Cross and Notre Dame, our good friend and colleague, Father John J. Cavanaugh. This is, as he was fond of saying, a melancholy duty, although I must confess that I do not really feel melancholy about it. As St. Paul says in the reading to the Romans, each one of our lives is a kind of sermon. "The life and death of each of us has its influence on others." (Rom. 14.7) Father John has left us all a good sermon of a life lived for more than eighty years. About that, even as we celebrate his coming home safely to harbor, we might better feel happy today, inspired and especially grateful. I am sure his brother, Father Frank, joins us in this.

John's life began on anything but a promising note. His father died at an early age so that John became the breadwinner of the family and went to work on the railroad in Owosso, Michigan, instead of going to high school. However, that early sacrifice was to be characteristic of his whole life: it was his duty, however difficult, and he did it. He did manage to learn shorthand and typing, somehow, and before long, again, characteristically Cavanaugh, we find him in secretarial service to the senior Henry Ford. Then he learned that a namesake of his, Father John W. Cavanaugh, was President of the University of Notre Dame. Somehow again, John dickered with him for a four year scholarship to

Notre Dame in exchange for two previous years of secretarial service. When the time came to begin college, two years later, John confessed to the astonished President that he had never attended high school. Again he proposed a unique deal: if he ever failed to achieve less than 90% in any course, he would consider that he had forfeited the scholarship. Not only did he graduate with highest honors, but was elected president of his class.

The local Studebaker Corporation eagerly employed him. Again, through exceptional performance and fortuitous circumstances, he became an officer of the company within two years. Despite this quick success, something was nagging at him, deep within. Studebaker ~~P~~resident Paul Hoffman told me in later years that John came into his office one day, after a successful nation-wide advertising tour, and confided to him that he was considering becoming a priest. Paul said to me jokingly, "I strongly encouraged him to give it a try. Before long, otherwise, he would have had my job."

His old boss, Father John Cavanaugh, knew him well and gave him some sage advice as he left for the novitiate, across the lake, on campus, in 1925. "Remember, John, you're joining a religious community, not founding one; don't try to change everything over there next week." I'm sure the years of preparation passed all too slowly for him, especially repeating the course of philosophy, obtaining a Master's degree in English, and doing four years more of theology in Washington. Even so, once ordained, he was assigned to study for a graduate degree in philosophy at the Gregorian University in Rome. Following him there,

many years later, I found that he was still a legend in the Holy Cross House on Via dei Cappuccini, 19.

Studies finally completed, he returned to teach at Notre Dame in 1933 and to succeed Father John O'Hara (later to be President and Cardinal) as Prefect of Religion, the then archaic French title for Student Chaplain. Finally, his priesthood and facile pen were fully at work, but seven years later, he found himself Vice President to Father J. Hugh O'Donnell who presided over the University during the war years. In 1946, John was back in the office where he began as a secretary at Notre Dame, this time to begin the usual six years of presidency. Under his brilliant and imaginative leadership, these were to be absolutely key years in the long history of the University's upward march from a log cabin by a frozen lake to a world renowned institution of higher learning. Through his participation on federal commissions, he brought Notre Dame into national recognition beyond football, although those were national championship years as well. He sought excellence in everything: graduate studies and advanced research institutes, a revitalization of the liberal arts through a Great Books program which still flourishes, a revamping of the University administration by five new vice presidencies, and acquiring the resources to do it all by creating a Notre Dame Foundation which in the next twenty-five years was to raise over two hundred million dollars and bring the University's endowment to nineteenth among American private universities. He admirably continued this latter endeavor for many years after leaving the presidency. His last years of service saw the wheel come full round, as he once again was a campus minister, this time to the young women at Saint Mary's...and to their boyfriends, who also sought his counsel.

These are the bare facts of his life, but the substance of his life's sermon shines through the kind of person he was. I had my first personal indication of this when, as a very young priest, I was protesting his invitation that I join him in administration. "It isn't all that bad," he said, "administration is mainly making good decisions." "But how do you learn how to do that?" I questioned. "Quite easy," he said with that irresistible Irish charm that sparkled from his eyes, "just decide what is the right and just and best thing to do, and then do it, no matter what it costs, no matter if it makes you very unpopular, no matter how difficult it will be to make it stick." The key word here, which he personified, is integrity. I soon had occasion, as his Executive Vice President, to put this advice to the test. He had given me, as a first assignment, the task of restoring good management to a University operation that involved a world famous person, whereas I was an unknown newcomer, terribly young and inexperienced. I put his advice to work and an explosion was about to occur. Walking into his office, I put it to him "We're at the crossroads, and if he doesn't comply, either he goes or I go." Again, with a twinkle in his eye that did not really hide his steely conviction, he calmly said: "Very simple. What you propose is the right thing to do. Either he complies, or he goes." I can now confess that I breathed a sigh of relief when the famous person complied, but I also learned what it means to practice integrity, whatever the cost.

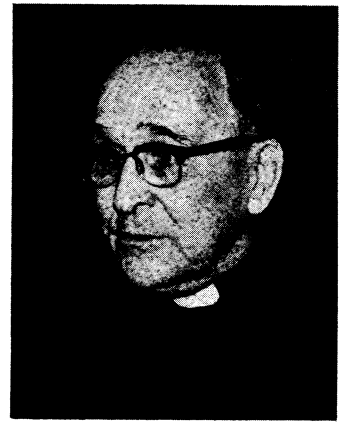
So many things one learned from him. The value of sobriety; the need to simplify complicated situations by cutting through to the essential core of what was really important; the importance of being human and humane; not to bear grudges, or feel self-important; to be one's self, even in the company of the powerful; never to compromise one's convictions, whatever the cost; cherishing intelligence and being determined to use one's freedom well, never bartering it, again whatever the cost. He was a superlative teacher, just by being what he was. He never postured, he never lost his temper, even though he felt strongly on most important matters, he never took advantage of his position to humiliate others, even if they deserved humiliation. And when someone was dead wrong, he didn't tell them so, he just asked them a simple question that could not be honestly answered without the truth of the matter making the point, without humiliation. With all of this, he was quintessentially a warm, generous, and devoted friend who demanded much and gave much more.

His gift of friendship transcended Notre Dame and even Catholicism. His priestly concern touched the preeminent educators of his time, Robert Hutchins and Mortimer Adler, **as well as** great families like the Kennedys, whose patriarch father, Joseph, was a Trustee and dear friend of John's. **I**t was he who brought the family consolation with a dawn Mass in the East Room of the White House after the horrible day of assassination. Tom Watson of IBM, now United States Ambassador to Russia, told me that John was one of the three men he most admired in life and who can

speak of the host of Notre Dame alumni who were the beneficiaries of his priestly ministrations during their college years and in life's later crises.

I have never met anyone quite like John Cavanaugh, and I suspect that I never will, even though it would be a wonderful pleasure. I know something of the enormous temptations to which he was submitted. He did not fight them frontally or heroically; he simply brushed them off because they did not square with the commitments he had made in his youth when he conscientiously took "the path less traveled by." He put Notre Dame on the high road. Like his dear friend and Trustee, Bernard Voll, he felt deeply that this place had a rendezvous with destiny. All of us, in the years following his presidency, have been simply trying to realize his dreams, following in the path he pioneered. Now that he is no longer here to cheer us on, I am sure that he will continue to help and sustain us from on high, where he has met the Master he loved and served so well, whose vision he now enjoys face to face. And of one reality I am also profoundly certain, that he has met a lovely lady called Notre Dame. How She must have welcomed a good and faithful friend whose whole life has been dedicated to Her honor, in a place that bears Her name, and thanks to whose inspired efforts, is now more worthy of the beauty, the grace, and the wisdom of the Mother of God. In this holy season, when he has left us and joined Mother and Son, may he call upon them to shower upon us, and Her University, the peace and joy that he now enjoys in their company.

on the high road. Like his dear friend and trustee, Bernard Voll, he felt deeply that this place had a rendezvous with destiny. All of us, in the years following his presidency, have been simply trying to realize his dreams, following in the path he pioneered. Now that he is no longer here to cheer us on, I am sure that he will continue to help and sustain us from on high, where he has met the Master he loved and served so well, Whose vision he now enjoys face to face. And of one reality I am also profoundly certain, that he has met a lovely lady called Notre Dame. How she must have welcomed a good and faithful friend whose whole life has been dedicated to her honor, in a place that bears her name, and thanks to whose inspired efforts, is now more worthy of the beauty, the grace and the wisdom of the Mother of God. In this holy season, when he has left us and joined Mother and Son, may he call upon them to shower upon us, and her University, the peace and joy that he now enjoys in their company.



A Eulogy

John J. Cavanaugh, C.S.C.
 Fourteenth President of
 the University of Notre Dame
 1899-1979

-
- | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Pallbearers | Honorary Pallbearers |
| Joseph Gargan | Jerome J. Crowley |
| Judd Leighton | Robert E. Dowd |
| Daniel A. Manion | Louis J. Finske |
| James R. McCaffery | Dr. Charles A. Hufnagel |
| Christopher J. Murphy III | John J. Kean |
| William H. Voll | John F. O'Shaughnessy |
| | Charles M. Reagan |

Preached by
 Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C.
 at the Liturgy of Christian Burial
 December 31, 1979
 Sacred Heart Church
 Notre Dame, Indiana