

Eulogy delivered by the Rev. Theodore M.  
Hesburgh, C.S.C., President, University  
of Notre Dame, at the funeral of Rev.  
Thomas McDonagh, C.S.C., December 2, 1985

On behalf of all of us in Holy Cross who knew and loved Father Tom McDonagh, may I offer a word of heartfelt sympathy to his relatives, especially his sister, Georgina, and his brother, Jack, and their families. He loved all of you dearly, but I need not tell you that. You know it.

I trust all will forgive the rather personal nature of my remarks this afternoon. Tom and I were like brothers during the nine years of our lives when brothers were very important to each other -- during the seemingly endless years of formation in Holy Cross.

Three of us arrived at Holy Cross Seminary over a half century ago, I just after Tom and Gus Fell just after me. Our early association was very supportive to each one of us, since like the Esquadrielle Lafayette in World War I, other aspirants continually failed to show up at meals which meant they were gone for good.

The following Summer, Gus Fell and I, being New Yorkers, traveled together to St. Joseph's Novitiate in Rolling Prairie and again, Tom, being a Hoosier, beat us there and was hanging out of an upstairs window greeting us loudly when we arrived carrying our valises up the dusty road to the front door. He was quickly told by the Novice Master, Father Kerndt Healy, that this was not an acceptable practice at the Novitiate.

Hardly anything we were used to doing -- like talking -- was an acceptable practice there. Anyway, we three survived the eight day retreat and received the Holy Cross habit together fifty years ago last August 15th.

The next thirteen months were like the massacre at Fort Apache. We began with twenty-nine clerical novices and nine survived to take first vows in 1936, two of whom left the next year reducing our company to seven. Thank God, the three of us survived, but we very much survived together. As our many friends left, our friendship grew stronger.

Then there was a year at Moreau Seminary which seemed like Freedom Park after Rolling Prairie. Towards the end of Summer School, 1937, I was summoned to the office of the Assistant Superior, Father Ted Mehling, and handed a piece of paper that simply said, as obediences then did, "To study in Rome." Father Mehling, who handed me this shocker as if it were the morning newspaper just said: "Have Mr. McDonagh come up. He's going too, for eight years."

Later in September, Tom saw New York for the first time, then we saw Paris, LeMans, and Rome. We laughed at each other as we donned those crazy Roman hats and coats and together tried to learn three languages at once. He was very good at it.

Somehow we coped and survived the next three years in a small house that was in some ways more difficult than the Novitiate had been. But that was an experience out of which friendship grows stronger and ours did grow through long walks, our only recreation,

and even longer conversations together, often about the dreams that young men dream, especially if they are both studying to be priests.

The highlight came at the top of a remote mountain, The Chapel of the Hermitage of Camaldoli, in Central Italy near Arezzo, when on August 16, 1939, Tom and I knelt and took our final vows together and received our crosses. Then back to Rome for the first year of theology.

A year later, the blitzkrieg burst upon Europe and we were ordered home. At least it meant a revival of the triumvirate, being with Gus Fell again, who was voluble about how we had been spoiled in Rome. Anyway, we were glad to be home again.

The successive steps proceeded in Washington as they did in those days, subdiaconate, diaconate, and finally we were ordained priests on June 24, 1943, in this very sanctuary. Always the order was the same, Tom first, then I, then Gus -- but always together and happily so.

Our lives were never quite the same after ordination. Gus was off to serve the missions. Tom spent another six years starting from scratch to get a doctorate in Economics, first at the University of Minnesota, then Wisconsin. Then there were Tom's years of teaching at Notre Dame, chairing the Department of Economics, and then, in a very difficult time, he served as our local Superior for six years.

Years later, our trio was to be together again for the Provincial Chapter at Portland in 1973. Tom and Gus, lucky dogs

I thought, were driving out together through Banff and British Columbia. After a golf game in Victoria, Vancouver Island, Tom had a heart attack, almost scaring Gus to death in the process. Gus and I visited Tom in the Canadian hospital after the Chapter, hoping he had not been mortally wounded, but, in a way, he was.

He kept on going though, exercising his priesthood as best he could. Bishop Paul Waldschmidt had given him the nickname of Caritas (charity) and that was what characterized his care for elderly nuns, errant and not so errant priests, students, and a host of people his life touched. He gave to everyone everything he had, he gave it in unabashed love. He had a gift of understanding those in need, he reached out unerringly, he gave all he had to give, and he healed many while hiding his own troubles.

From what I said earlier, I would not want to infer that he was not close to our classmates. In many ways, he was closer than anyone else. All our class are grateful to Ed Goedert -- returning from a long and fruitful missionary life in Bangladesh and giving Tom the kind of caring friendship he needed during this last painful year. Ed has spoken feelingly of Tom's care for our other classmates, Tom Brennan and Greg Steigmeyer, in the long months before they died.

But Tom and Gus and I were, though often far apart, always there in spirit as listed together in house age in our Holy Cross Directory.

Fortunately, last June 24th, the forty-second anniversary of our ordination, we were able to get out to dine together, to talk on into the night, to relive the years that have passed all too quickly, and yes, to look eternity in the face. It is not that far distant now. I sensed that Tom knew that he was the closest to eternity, and now he is in eternity, again being the first of the three of us to go.

Again, I beg your pardon for being personal, but how does one share the life of a brother with others without being personal. I never praised Tom to his face very much in life. He was too modest and would have been uncomfortable with praise. But I do praise him now for what he was: a good and large-hearted priest, a very dear friend and brother, a sharer in some of life's most precious and sacred moments, and now a beckoning memory of what we all aspire to: a happy eternity with Our Lord and His Blessed Mother whom we all try to serve, however falteringly, in this special place.

May Tom rest in peace. I know he will. Our Lady will see to that.