Mass of Christian Burial
Fr. William J. O'Brien, C.M.
March 20, 2026
SVS Community Chapel

Brothers and Sisters in Christ

Welcome everyone, friends of Father William Joseph O'Brien, confreres, nursing staff, members of the Central Association of the Miraculous Medal and Our Lady of Angels Association and, representing Bill's family, his niece Jacqueline and her sons Mike and Ryan. We are gathered this morning to remember our beloved confrere and friend, Father Bill. The passing of a loved one provides the occasion to remember the gifts of the deceased. God gifted Fr. Bill with many talents and marvelous qualities of character. He served faithfully, quietly, in various Vincentian ministries: parochial leadership in five parishes, Director of Our Lady of Angels Association for some twenty-nine years, twice Director at the Central Association of the Miraculous Medal, Superior at Niagara University, a formator at the Vincentian Residence and House Treasurer here at St. Vincent's Seminary.

Our Community custom directs confreres to indicate what they request to celebrate their funeral Mass. Fr. Bill requested that the homilist be a "classmate if possible". Since I am the only classmate still alive I fit the bill – so here we are. I stand under written instructions from Bill to "give a homily and NOT a eulogy"! Sorry Bill; I have already expressed thanks to God for you and your conscientious fidelity to ministerial responsibilities Fortunately, Bill has chosen readings appropriate to preach this homily at his funeral Mass of Christian Burial; these readings challenge all of us to believe in Christ as central to our lives.

Today the prophet Isaiah promises "the Lord of hosts will provide for all peoples"; he assures us that God will destroy death forever. It is the Lord to whom we look. Let us rejoice and be glad, Isaiah announces, that God has saved us! Indeed, Isaiah's prophecy has been fulfilled; we can rest assured that God has saved us in Christ.

In his letter to the Romans, St. Paul affirms "If God is for us who can be against us?" He goes on to declare that God did not spare his own Son but handed him over for all of us; he asks will God not give us everything else along with him? Yes, in Christ God gives us everything we need: forgiveness, the Spirit to guide us, the promise of eternal life for we who have been nourished by bread from heaven: As Jesus promised: "whoever eats this Bread will live forever".

Paul affirms: "No one will be able to bring a charge against us." We continue to call upon Christ Jesus to intercede for us, as we do in our penitential rite at Mass: "Lord

Jesus, You intercede for us at the right hand of our Father, Lord have mercy". Our good works, inspired by faith, will prepare us to be ready when we are called to the kingdom.

Some of us, like Fr. Bill, may have to suffer great hardships while we wait. If so, we have a chance to practice what the Lord demanded of all of us, "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it."

Paul assures us today: Nothing "will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." For all of us who believe, our deaths will eventually be much more than occasions for friends and family to eulogize our lives. Those we leave behind will be able to celebrate our birth into heaven. That is what we are doing now for our confrere Fr. Bill.

In his choice for our Gospel reading Fr. Bill highlights for us life-resurrection in our lives as Christians. This coming Sunday, we will hear an extended reading from the Gospel of John. It is the greatest of the seven Signs Jesus performed to prove that he was sent by the Father. On Sunday we will hear Martha, the sister of Lazarus, affirming her belief in resurrection on the final day. Jesus tells her and us, "I am the Resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" Martha said to Jesus, "Yes, Lord. I have come to believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world."

Jesus asks us today: "Do you believe I am the resurrection and the life?" With God's help we respond with a resounding YES. I believe.

Fr. Bill had great devotion to Mary, the mother of Jesus. He honed his love for his Blessed Mother in the parishes he served, among them four that carried Mary's titles: the Immaculate in Baltimore, another Immaculate in Philadelphia, St. Mary's in Greensboro and Our Lady of Lebanon in Niagara Falls. As Director of our two Marian Associations he promoted devotion to Mary as Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal and Our Lady of Angels. After we anointed Bill last Thursday, I spent Friday and Saturday with my family. I felt drawn to call upon Bill's Blessed Mother through her Ave Maria. The second half of the Hail Mary seemed most appropriate for Bill who lay dying on his bed: "Holy Mary, Mother of God pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death."

We call upon Mary now. Together we pray as Fr. Bill often did: "O Mary conceived without sin, *pray for us who have recourse to you."*

AMEN!