

IT IS FINISHED

A PRIESTLY VOCATION OF MERCY

By Rev. Charles E. McCarthy



Fr. Edward J. McDonough's healing ministry stretched over forty years. He was a faithful servant of Christ like mercy, and a hero of Christ like merciful love.

Edward J. McDonough, C.Ss.R. was a priest. His healing ministry of four decades was known throughout the world. In the last few days of his eighty-six years of life on earth, he would on occasion raise up his two arms in bed in a gesture of prayer and say in a soft voice, “*Jesus, Mary and Joseph, it’s Ed McDonough here.*” How simple, honest, straightforward, humble and trusting. How utterly consistent with who he was and what he was. What a magnificent witness to faith in God and God’s Merciful Plan for the salvation of all through Jesus Christ!

Now I am certain that when Ed finally left this earth, at 1 A.M. on the morning of February 11, 2008, while family and friends

were praying the Divine Mercy Chaplet at his bedside, and arrived in the presence of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, he heard them exclaim wholeheartedly, “*Céad Mile Fáilte!*”-“*A hundred thousand welcomes!*” (Jesus, Mary and Joseph speak Irish in heaven!)

Then Jesus, the Son of Man, would have stepped forward and said in a voice brimming with love, “*Ed, welcome into the Kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world for I was ill and you cared for me*” (MT 25:36 FF).

What I am saying here is not a sentimental yarn whose intention is to ease the pain

of the death. It is fact of faith based in three realities: 1) the nature of God as revealed to humanity by Jesus Christ; 2) Jesus’ explicit declaration in the 25th chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew regarding the standard of judgment that will be apply to all people at the end of time; 3) the historical content of the life of this priest.

First, Jesus teaches humanity that the one and only God is “*Abba,*” “*Father of all.*” He teaches humanity that “*God is love.*” The Church, consistent with the teachings of Jesus teaches that God is a “*God of perfect peace, violence and cruelty can have no part with Him*” (The

Roman Missal, *Mass for Peace and Justice*, opening prayer). Pope John Paul II in his Encyclical, *Dives in Misericordia*, writes “It is God who is rich in mercy that Jesus Christ has revealed to us as Father...Mercy (is) the most stupendous attribute of the Creator and the Redeemer.” And, in case there be any ambiguity about what the will of the Father is on earth or what authentic mercy looks like on earth, the Father sends His Son to show humanity His merciful love enfleshed: “*The Father and I are one,*” “*The person who sees me sees the Father,*” “*I come to do not my will but the will of the One who sent me,*” “*And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.*”

Second, it follows as day follows night, if “the most stupendous attribute of God is mercy,” it is by way of living in and out of this merciful love, as made visible by God Incarnate, that human beings become ever more profoundly united in will and in spirit with God. The conversion command of Jesus makes perfect logical sense: “*I desire mercy, not sacrifice*” (MT 9:13, 12:7). And so accordingly and with utter consistency, He further states that the standard of judgment at the end of time is mercy: “*I was hungry and you gave me to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me to drink...I was ill and you cared for me, etc., and whatever you did to the least of my brothers and sisters you did to me*” (MT 25: 31-46). The Way to the Father, then, is to “*be merciful as your heavenly Father is merciful,*” to be merciful as Jesus, “*the image of the invisible God*” (COL 1:15), is merciful.

Third, here is where the historical content of Ed’s life enters. Ed McDonough is a hero, a hero of mercy, a hero of Christ like merciful love. “Hero” here is not meant to convey any of the trite notions of hero that culture promotes, e.g., a sport’s star, a media luminary, a film celebrity, a neurotic risk-taker, etc. Nor, is it meant to convey an idea of a hero who is the glorification of nothing more than a momentary adrenaline rush. Hero here means a person who with full knowledge and full consent chooses to lay down his or her life, who is willing to accept loss, suffering and death if necessary, in order to try to do something that will allow others to have life. The ultimate hero

then would be a person who would chose to deliberately use up his or her life’s time so that others could have more of a life on earth and eternal life with God in heaven. For those who believe that Jesus is their Lord, God and Savior, the Way of Christ like mercy is the Way to actively participate in accomplishing this.

Edward McDonough, Baptized Christian and servant priest chose this way of



life, this Way of Christ like merciful love unreservedly-and lived it to heroic proportions. I would like to give but one example from Ed’s life that illustrates this choice. Healing, of course, brings life to people. Having someone care enough about a person to try to bring that person healing, brings hope to that person, and hope in itself brings life or brings some life back. This good priest’s healing ministry over forty years stretched from the Basilica of Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Boston to Ireland to France, to Yugoslavia, to Australia, to only God knows where. It packed Churches around the world bringing healing and hope, life and peace to only God knows how many. But, even though he exhausted himself and worked himself beyond what would normally be considered prudent in conducting these

great healing missions far and wide, it is not for these that I refer to him as a hero of Christic mercy. For these, I would say he was a faithful servant of Christ like mercy. Hero is a giant step beyond servant.

For as long as Ed and I have been friends, which is over two decades, I have never ceased to be spiritually uplifted, indeed inspired, by something he did

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every Monday through Friday night when he was not out of town. On every weekday evening starting about 7 P.M. he would preside at an unadvertised “healing Mass.” It would always begin with the full Rosary (15 and toward the end 20 decades) with all the trimmings (a spiritual reflection before each decade and the Lourdes’ Ave sung after each decade), followed by Mass and prayers for healing through the intercession of the Blessed Mother. But then, every night, he would go to every single person who came to the Mass and pray over them personally. On any given evening, in the downstairs of the Sacred Heart Church in Malden, MA where he did this for about ten years or in the parish auditorium of Sacred Heart Parish in Watertown, MA where he went about this for another decade, night after

night he would go to each person who came and pray with him or her after the full Rosary and the celebration of the Eucharist.

Now there were not large numbers of people who came to these Masses, since they were not advertised. Maybe forty or fifty on any given night, with a significant turn-over from one week to the next. The first time I saw Ed go out into the congre-

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gation after the full Rosary and the Mass and begin to pray with each person individually, I somewhat dejectedly thought to myself, *"Oh boy, this is going to take all night!"* But, as I intermittently watched this effort-month after month, year after year, decade after decade-his extraordinary goodness and kindness and mercy became glowingly apparent to me. Ed was, without fanfare or notoriety, without a large congregation present, pouring his life out in nightly prayer, worship and mercy for a few anonymous souls who, in so many instances, were desperate and imprisoned by some form of darkness due to an affliction.

"I was ill and you cared for me... whatever you did for the least of my brother and sisters, you did for me" (Mt 25: 31-

46), says Jesus. Giving his time to care for and bring hope, by way of prayer, to each and every person who came to that Mass was a deliberate choice by this priest to use up his life in the Holy Spirit of Christ like mercy. Ed was a well-educated man, quite conscious of the cultural, political and theological realities of his time. No more evidence is needed of this than his unequivocally stated opposition to abortion, which was for him not simply the espousal of an isolat-



ed cause, but was rather a commitment of conscience rooted in his commitment to the Jesus and to his seamless-garment understanding of the Nonviolent Jesus and His Way of Nonviolent Love of friends and enemies. *"No,"* to abortion, *"No,"* to war, *"No,"* to capital punishment, *"No,"* to euthanasia-and, *"Yes,"* to mercy toward all of God's sons and daughters, whether friends or enemies, rich or poor, white or black was what Priest Edward taught and lived-and to which he witnessed before the world.

Years before the Supreme Court of the United States got around to making segregation illegal, Ed McDon-ough, as a priest in the South, was rejecting it as not being right, as not being in accord with the will of God as revealed by Jesus-and he was nearly mur-

dered, by a white racist Christian for publicly saying so and living accordingly.

Be assured, Ed was a smart and aware person, who could have done many other things with his life's time every weekday night other than pray for and with and over the ill and afflicted. But, he chose to sacrifice those other options in order to try to bring new life, temporal and eternal, into the lives of those that he did not know, but who were ensnared in pain, panic or debilitating confusion. This is why I see him as a hero of Christ like mercy. But it does not stop there. Ed made perhaps tens of thousands of hospital visits and house calls at the request of someone or another. A few visits now and then to a few people who are hospitalized, an occasional prayer with someone who wants you to pray with or over him or her is, as I have said, being a faithful servant of mercy. Four decades of doing this day-in and day-out, night-in and night-out is authentic heroism, heroism in the service of Divine Mercy.

Why did Ed choose this life? He chose it because he knew that if merciful love is the supreme attribute of God, then merciful love must be what God made human beings in His own image and likeness to do, while living in this present vale of tears and fears, of sighing and suffering, of sin and death. He chose it because this was Jesus' Way and Edward McDonough, Christian and priest, wanted to faithfully follow Jesus by struggling to follow Jesus' *"new commandment,"* to *"love one another as I have loved you,"* and by trying to love those whom Jesus especially carried in His heart-the wounded, the broken, the sick, the suffering, the dying, the enemy, the sinner, the unloved, the poor in spirit, the *anawim*-the nobodies in the eyes of the world.

This historical truth of the life Edward J. McDonough, C.Ss.R., not sentimentality nor wishful thinking, is why in the beginning of this reflection I said that at 1 A.M. on February 11, 2008, as family and friends were praying the Divine

Mercy Chaplet at his bedside, and he arrived in the presence of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, he heard them wholeheartedly exclaim “*Céad Míle Fáilte!*”-“*A hundred thousand welcomes!*”

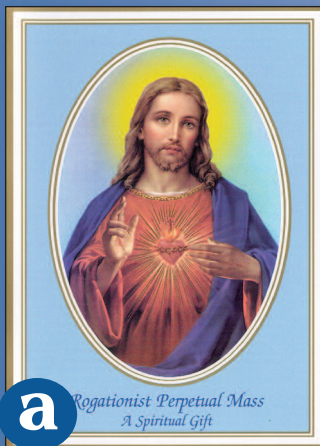
Finally, I will only note and leave it to others to interpret the meaning of, the implications and/or the purpose of the historical fact that Ed McDonough-perhaps the most well known Marian healing priest in the world-dies on what in the Catholic calendar is the World Day for the Sick, the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes-the apparition of the Mother of God from whence has flowed uncountable numbers of healings. Is the fact Ed dies 150 years to the day after Mary first appears to St. Bernadette at Lourdes just an accident, or is it the final miracle that God, who is love, is giving to humanity, for its temporal and eternal healing, through the Blessed Mother and her spiritual son, the Remptorist priest, Edward J. McDonough? At a bare minimum it would seem at least to communicate and confirm that the Way that Ed chose-the Way of Christ like mercy lived with the perpetual help of Our Lady-is The Way to go, if go some way we must.

So, let me conclude with the final words of the eulogy I delivered at the Mass of the Resurrection for Edward J. McDonough, C.Ss.R.: “While it is difficult to separate, for a time, from someone we love and care for, and while it is appropriate to say of Ed McDonough, ‘*Ah, we’ll never see the likes of him again,*’ nevertheless, in our hearts today we should be ceaselessly saying, ‘*Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!*’, because God is faithful to His promises and His Word is true-and God said ‘*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.*’



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