

***“We Hold This Treasure in Earthen Vessels”***  
***Homily for Tom Stegman’s funeral***

*We hold this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing power may be of God and not from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not constrained; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our body.*

**What better way to commend our brother Tom Stegman to the Lord than to listen to the words of his beloved St. Paul. How well Tom knew the truth of these words and how they resonate with us today: *We hold this treasure in earthen vessels*. For a healthy man what a shock it was in July of 2019 when Tom was diagnosed with glioblastoma, a brain disease that normally has a six-month life expectation. That week started a valiant journey with the help of the medical team at the Brigham and the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute – not to mention the accompaniment of Kim Noonan, our extraordinary nurse, with Michael Boughton our indefatigable superior, and with the Jesuits and staff of Campion Health Care Center – and of course with his faithful and devoted family. What gratitude we owe all of these people who accompanied Tom so well.**

**We could spend a lot of time remembering Tom’s wonderfully attractive personality and many gifts:**

**His great capacity for friendship with all sorts of people  
His delightful sense of humor – especially when it came to nicknames  
His avid - *did I say avid?* – support of the Cardinals and the Packers. [I was going to suggest that Tom be buried in a green chasuble with gold trimming but feared that would be over the top!]  
His enjoyment of being an athlete and of all things sports.  
His love of theatre and music.**

**Tom was the epitome of a well-rounded man. He was also of course a scholar, a priest and a Jesuit. As we all know, Tom loved the Sacred Scriptures, especially St. Paul and particularly the Paul who wrote Romans and 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians. To say that he excelled at teaching Scripture is to say much too little. His conviction of the truth of Scripture just poured out of him and did not fail to make a deep impression on his many, many students over**

the years – not to mention the many priests and religious who benefited from his retreats and workshops and the many parishioners in Malden, Everett and Revere who were treated to his Sunday homilies.

Teaching was a part of Tom's priestly ministry which he cherished and to which he gave himself with unflagging energy. He also had the gift of making the Scriptures come alive in his preaching and he had the enviable talent of preaching to young people, even very young people. As if this were not enough, Tom accepted the deanship of the BC STM with a great devotion as a priestly ministry and was an excellent dean for six years, including his three years coping with his illness with great grace and courage.

Tom was an exemplary Jesuit, a much-loved and respected member of our Faber Jesuit Community and so admired by his brothers in the Wisconsin Province that they elected him both to a Procurator's Congregation and then to the Society's 36<sup>th</sup> General Congregation.

All of this is very impressive indeed but I have not said the most important thing: something that we dare not neglect to say today: Tom was a man of deep and genuine faith. Don't those words of his beloved St. Paul in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians that we heard ring true – as if Tom himself were speaking them today?

*7 But we hold this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing power may be of God and not from us.*

*8 We are afflicted in every way, but not constrained; perplexed, but not driven to despair; 9persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed;*

*10 always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our body.*

Tom put his faith above all in the faithfulness of Christ, Christ's own faithfulness to God, in Greek the *Pistis Christou* (Rom 3:21-22), of which he wrote a good deal. That faith emanated from him and was a quality that so many of us found attractive. I have rarely met someone of such transparent faith. He was the real deal, the genuine article, and I think that his deep and transparent faith was a big part of what made Tom so attractive to so many people. [Well, that in addition to his Midwestern charm. So much good came out of Holdredge, Nebraska!] Two of Tom's heroes, Walter Cizek and Dan Harrington were also men of great faith and he did them proud by his devotion to them.

Since Tom wrote so eloquently on our passage from 2 Corinthians, the letter on which he wrote his doctoral dissertation as well as a commentary, let me quote his own words:

*It is easy to doubt ourselves in moments of discouragement and failure, real or apparent. Paul, however, reminds us that we do have a precious treasure, the treasure of the gospel. Moreover, we do have the Spirit's power at work within us. Rather than despair, we are invited to rely even more on God's grace so that we can share with others the treasure we have received.*

We've all come here today to remember Tom, to commend him to the compassionate mercy of God, to mourn his passing, and to acknowledge our own sadness and loss. But let me suggest to you my brothers and sisters that we will not honor his memory if we do not try to honor and imitate his deep and enduring faith in the Lord who suffered, died and rose for us. Since throughout his life and especially these last years of his struggle with cancer Tom put his faith in the faithfulness of Jesus. He believed with all his heart in the Lord to whom he committed himself in his Jesuit vows so many years ago.

Let's pray today that Tom's faith may be an example to us. Let's pray that our faith in the Lord who is 'the resurrection and the life' - a faith that he held tenaciously - let's pray that such a faith may deepen ever more in us. Let's pray that we can really believe as I know Tom did the truth of those beautiful words we sang at the beginning of our liturgy:

*We shall rise again on the last day  
With the faithful rich and poor  
Coming to the house of Lord Jesus  
We will find an open door there.  
We will find an open door.*

As we've come together to celebrate the Church's rites and to commend our dear brother to our merciful God, we do well to remember his wonderful qualities and accomplishments. But if we *really* want to honor Tom's memory we do best to be inspired by his faith and ask the Lord's help and grace to imitate it.

Dennis, Patti, Mike, Mark, our hearts go out to you and to the whole Stegman clan. You have lost someone so dear and I think I can assure you that all of us here grieve with you. But I also hope that you can confidently agree that Tom can now say with St. Paul:

*I have fought the good fight; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith. From now on the crown of righteousness awaits me, which the Lord, the just judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me, but to all who have longed for his appearance. (2 Tim 4:7-8)*

**Many of us know that decades ago Tom had surgery to remove a tumor that left him deaf in his left ear. There were moments in his illness when he thought he would lose his hearing entirely and that distressed him deeply. And as we commend him to the Lord he loved and served so faithfully, we can justly hope that he will hear clear as a bell the Gospel words:**

*‘Well done, my good and faithful servant.... Come, share your master’s joy.’ Mt 25:23*

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