

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today I have some very sad news to report to you. Fr. Dave Sullivan died Friday night. Fr. Dave grew up in Little Flower Parish and attended Little Flower School. He was ordained a Maryknoll Missioner on June 11, 1960 and celebrated his First Solemn Mass here at Little Flower. After his ordination, Father Dave ministered in mission education in Chicago and also served in Denver. He later ministered in various locales in the Philippines from 1974 until 2005. After he returned from the Philippines, he served as the pastoral care coordinator and chaplain at St. Teresa's Residence at Maryknoll.

Fr. Dave never lost his love for Little Flower Parish and for all the parishioners. He came home as often as he could. In recent years, he came home every summer. When he was home, he wanted to work. He celebrated Sunday and weekday Masses, heard confessions, anointed the sick, and visited the homebound. We celebrated his 50th anniversary of ordination here at Little Flower on July 25, 2010.

As you know, while he was in the Philippines, Fr. Dave started a scholarship program so students in the Philippines could attend college. Over the years, he funded it with the help of donors whom he had met during his assignments in the United States and through your generosity. You may remember that although he was not able to visit this summer, we took up a special collection to help him continue to fund the program.

He had to leave the Philippines in 2005 because of health issues, which he battled until his death. One was a particularly bad fungal infection common in the Philippines. Another was bladder cancer. This past summer he was diagnosed with a recurrence of bladder cancer as well as prostate cancer and lung cancer. He has been receiving treatments for lung cancer since then. This past week he suffered a detached retina, which was extremely painful, and it was discovered that the cancer had entered his brain.

Every time I talked to him these last few months, he was cheerful and optimistic despite the treatments he was receiving. He told me he hoped to be able to visit Little Flower one more time to tell you how much he loved Little Flower and to thank you for all your support throughout the years. At the same time, he would tell me that he was willing and ready to die if that was God's will, and he sounded very much at peace every time he told me this. His sister Mary Jo said that the nurse told her that he had a very peaceful death.

As we celebrate the joy of Christmas, let us pray for Fr. Dave and for his family, especially our parishioners Mary Jo Campbell and Michelle Fontanella. Although he is now enjoying fullness of life with God, they, and we to a lesser extent, will be mourning his loss.

Two weeks ago the Gospel introduced the figure of John the Baptist. Today's Gospel introduces the figure of Mary, the Blessed Mother.

Today's Gospel picks up where the story of the Annunciation ends and tells the story of Mary's Visitation to her cousin Elizabeth. This is one of my favorite Gospel stories. Tradition suggests that Mary was very young when she conceived Jesus. Young and pregnant, she immediately left the security and the comfort of her home to travel to the hill country to help care for her elderly cousin Elizabeth.

What is significant about the story is that Mary brought Christ to Elizabeth on two different levels. First, she brought him physically because she was pregnant with Jesus. John the Baptist recognized Christ in her womb by leaping for joy. However, she also brought him in her love for her cousin. Finally, Elizabeth acknowledged Mary's trusting faith in God: *"Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled."*

My brothers and sisters, Fr. Dave's life and death embody the story of the Visitation. Fr. Dave left the security and comfort of the United States and went to minister to the people of the Philippines. Like Mary, he brought Christ to them on two levels. First, as a priest, he brought Jesus to them sacramentally. Second, he brought Christ to them in his love for them and his service to them. Finally, like Mary, he had a trusting faith in God as his death approached: *"Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled."*