# In Loving Memory of George

Funeral homily and family remembrance

## Homily

Delivered by the celebrant at George’s Requiem Mass. Edited lightly for readability from a spoken transcript.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

I promised Mona I'd be very short in what I have to say. Now, we pastors love to hear the sound of our own voices, and so that's quite a promise to make. But I will do my best.

George was there. George was there.

Three words I've heard many times over the past few days. George was there for the big moments in life, to help. He was there for the little moments. He was there to clean water up off the floor if you needed help. He was there to help you fix whatever you had broken in your house. He was there for the little things that you almost felt bad asking for help with.

But George was always there. He was, I think, the definition of an everyday hero to so many in his life.

Now, in the short time I knew George, I learned a few things about what he liked in life and what he enjoyed. He liked action movies and spy thrillers. He liked historical sagas of heroes doing good. He liked racing, and he liked cars. And at first this might seem like a random list of things, but I think as we go on you'll find all of it shares a central theme.

You see, there's a theory in sociology that the media we consume says something about us, what we want or what we desire. It doesn't mean that if you watch a horror movie you want to be trapped in a house being terrified and hunted down, but it means maybe you want a sense of excitement, or the extraordinary, or a step away from the mundane.

When I look at the media George liked, it emphasizes extraordinary acts of heroism, of bravery, and of stepping up to the plate when it was needed.

As a priest in my ministry, sometimes I'm told things that I will never be able to say to anyone else, that I'll take to the grave. I was very fortunate, therefore, that what I'm

about to say, George told me in a moment that I can share.

George asked me, one of the last evenings I was with him, a question, and I think a concern, that would surprise many of us. He said, "Have I done enough?"

I think for everyone who knows George and all he has done for others, that question may seem odd. Of course he's done enough. He's been there in our most needy times. But look at the media he liked. It's all about stepping up and being a hero. I worry George, in some ways, for a while didn't think of himself as a hero, which is amazing considering how much he's done for us.

And I told George, "Yes, you've spent your life giving to others. No, you weren't out there rappelling down buildings, maybe, or driving a car around a racetrack. You were doing something even more important and something even more difficult. You were being an everyday hero to the people we meet in our lives."

As we all know, that sometimes can be the hardest thing to do. George was there.

George was a hero. But I've already made a very grand mistake. George, I shouldn't say was a hero. He is a hero.

It's not George was always there. George is always there, in heaven right now, looking down upon us. We heard in the second reading that in heaven the laborer shall be able to find rest. But knowing George, I bet he's already doing some work for us up there right now, saying a silent prayer, thinking, "Oh, well, I need to make sure they're smiling."

George is an everyday hero. He still is, and he always will be. So I ask you, do not let this be the last time you speak with George.

[The family dog barked.] He agrees with me.

Do not let this be the last time you think about George. He's there praying for you and still doing those little acts of heroism and those big acts of service.

And I know he'd like to know that we all thought and knew he was, and is, an everyday hero. So I'd like you all to take a moment of silence and think about one time when George came into your life. Think about the smallest little thing that no one else might have come to help with or might have overlooked. Maybe he just grabbed something for you one time. Think about that moment and think, "Thank you," and keep thinking that.

And call upon him and pray for him, to him, and with him. If he was an everyday hero in life, he'll be a miraculous hero now in heaven.

And I know George would want me to say: Don't forget the other everyday heroes in your life. Maybe George didn't hear, "You're a hero to me," enough. He knows he's a hero now, and he hears it now. Don't let the other everyday heroes in your life ask the same question that George did: "Have I done enough?"

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

# A Daughter’s Tribute

Remarks delivered by George’s daughter following the homily. Lightly formatted from a spoken transcript.

When I was in the third grade, we were given an assignment in economics class. We had to choose a local business, interview someone who worked there, and share what we learned with our classmates. And of all the businesses I could have chosen, I chose a funeral home. I've always had some unusual interests, and apparently that started pretty young. I remember coming home excited to tell my parents all about the project. My mom, understandably, wasn't quite as enthusiastic. She had work, and taking her third grade daughter to explore a funeral home wasn't exactly at the top of her list. But dad? No problem. He took time away from work to bring me to my interview.

He helped me set up my deluxe girl talk recorder and sat quietly behind me as I interviewed a gentleman named Gary Raich. I was fascinated by the funeral home, but I was also nervous about asking all of those questions. Dad reassured me that there was nothing to worry about. He didn't take over or speak for me. He simply sat behind me and let me find my confidence. When it was time to get up and take a tour, I can't remember what he gave me. It was a little nod, or he gently touched my back. But I remember how he made me feel, like I could do it. And what makes that memory so extraordinary today is that the funeral home dad brought me to all those years ago was Clark Funeral Home.

This funeral home. And the gentleman who patiently answered my questions was Gary Raich, the very same man who has helped our family arrange dad's services. More than three decades later, here we are. And I can't help but think about dad sitting behind me that day. He didn't need to say very much. Somehow just having him there made me feel like I could do anything. And growing up, I genuinely believed there was nothing my dad couldn't do. The funny thing is, even as an adult, I never really stopped believing it. When Brian and I were preparing to move to Miami, the movers broke an elaborate handle on our front door.

Finding a replacement would have been a nightmare. But dad took one look at it, and I still can't tell you what he did. I honestly think there was a paper towel involved. But within seconds, it was fixed. Broken jewelry? Give it to dad. A dent in the car? Call dad. A chip in the windshield? Forget Safelite. We had George. He could spend hours figuring out how to repair something most people would have simply thrown away.

And somehow he often made it better than it was before. And the remarkable thing wasn't just that he could fix these things. It was that he never seemed particularly surprised by his own abilities. He'd figure something out, fix it, and move on. There was no big announcement, no need for recognition. He just enjoyed figuring things out. And that same curiosity often led him on adventures. Dad once built himself an electric bicycle and rode it along the back roads of the Poconos, recording his adventures as he went. He rode an elephant in Thailand with my mom, and the two of them loved taking trips together in the RV.

Although I have to say, dad was always a man on a mission when it came to driving, and he treated the GPS's estimated arrival time as something to beat. Growing up, even a bathroom break could feel like it was interfering with the mission. That curiosity and ingenuity were woven into our everyday lives. And some of my fondest memories are of summer Saturdays at home. Dad would spend the morning mowing the lawn, weed whacking, and building something new for us to enjoy. Maybe a patio, a spot for the barbecue or smoker, or another place where we could gather. At some point, he'd be outside with Vincent, and the two of them were working on something with the car, trying to figure things out together. Then lunchtime would roll around, and dad would come inside with beads of sweat on his forehead, ready to make something. Sometimes he'd take the leftovers from the night before and turn them into restaurant-quality fried rice.

Other times he'd decide to make a pizza, starting with his homemade dough. Afterward, he'd find his way to the piano, playing something from his music collection, or experimenting with another variation of Heart and Soul. I always had the feeling that Heart and Soul was really a love song for my mom. He may never have said it, but something about the way he kept coming back to it made me feel like he was playing it for her. In the span of a single afternoon, dad could be a landscaper, a builder, a mechanic, a chef, and a musician. And that was just a Saturday at our house. Dad also had an incredible way with animals, and at the International Gymnastics Camp, he was practically the Cesar Millan of goats, llamas, and peacocks. I still remember those llamas, Lorenzo and Alamuchi, looking at dad so affectionately and rubbing their heads against his hand whenever he reached out to them. And the goats always knew dad was coming with their wheat thins.

Dad even built them their own house, complete with air conditioning, to keep them comfortable during the hot summers. When dad spoke to them, it was almost as though they understood every word. And for someone who was always doing something, dad knew when to recharge his batteries, too. You could usually find him watching an action movie, a Thai film, or a Chinese drama he loved finding online, with a dog by his side. From Luca and Dolce to Mickey, Mills, and Teddy, dad loved getting them all riled up and

playing with them, only to end up snuggling together afterward. For someone who put so much thought and care into everything he did, dad was also one of the most easygoing people I've ever known. Although getting a straight answer out of him wasn't always easy. Dad, do you want some coffee? Yes and no. How about some dessert? No.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. And somehow the answer usually ended up being yes. He never wanted anyone to go out of their way for him, but he was always willing to go out of his way for someone else. And nowhere was that more apparent than with my mom. She was the love of his life, and making her happy was the simplest and greatest joy he had. If she asked him what he wanted for dinner, didn't matter. That was Dad's way of saying, 'It doesn't matter.' Whatever Mona wanted was fine. In fact, dad preferred that she decide because seeing her happy made him happy.

I think some of that easygoing nature came from his Thai upbringing. If you've ever been to Bangkok, you know that getting around can be an adventure. Tuk-tuks weaving through traffic, cars and motorcycles everywhere, and what sometimes feels like a completely different understanding of the rules of the road. And inevitably, with all that chaos, there are fender benders. But rather than turning every little accident into an argument, there's a Thai expression, mai pen rai. It's okay, no problem, don't worry about it. It's a way of extending a little grace to someone else. Things happen, there's no reason to make a bigger problem out of something so small. And in our family, dad had his own version, didn't matter.

The older I get, the more I appreciate the wisdom behind those two words. Because dad wasn't someone who thought nothing mattered. It's quite the opposite. He cared deeply about his family, he worked hard, he built things meticulously and took an enormous pride in doing things well. So when dad said didn't matter, he wasn't saying that nothing mattered. He was reminding us that not everything was worth worrying about. You put your best foot forward, you do what you can, and sometimes you just have to let the rest go. And one of the things that brings me so much joy is seeing how dad's influence has extended to Brian and his three amazing kids, who aren't kids anymore. Dad had such a wonderful way of showing his love through the things he did.

At Ella's graduation party, while everyone else kept walking past the watermelon, dad quietly took it upon himself to skillfully prepare it for everyone. He removed the rind without wasting any of the fruit, cutting it into these professional pieces that everyone could easily grab and go. At Jake's graduation party, he stepped right up and carved an entire pig, as though he'd done it a hundred times before. And knowing how much Sid loved donuts growing up, dad made them from him from scratch. Nobody had asked him to do any of these things. He simply noticed what needed doing, or what might bring

someone joy, and he did it. And that's how dad showed his love. And somewhere along the way, didn't matter became part of their vocabulary too. Now when something doesn't go according to plan, or I find myself getting worked up over something so small, I'll hear Brian or one of the kids say those familiar words.

"Didn't matter." And it makes me smile. Because what started as something my dad would say has become something we all carry with us. I think that's also one of the things I've come to appreciate most as I've gotten older. My dad didn't set us down and give us grand lessons about life. He taught us through the way he lived. He taught us to be curious, to embrace the things that made us different, and to believe that we could figure it out. He taught us to take pride in our work, and to put our hearts into the things that mattered. And he showed us that love doesn't always have to be expressed in words.

Sometimes it was simply sitting quietly behind your little girl, giving her the confidence to explore something she was curious about. My dad was a man of few words, but he gave us so much through his actions. And I know that in the days and years ahead, I'll miss those ordinary moments more than anything. I'll miss knowing that whenever something broke, I could call dad. I'll miss his calm, matter-of-fact answers to my questions. And I'll miss the sound of him tinkering with something in another room. Most of all, I'll miss his hugs. Those strong, reassuring hugs that made you feel like everything was going to be okay. Dad never pulled away first.

He held on for as long as you needed him to. But I also know that so much of who he was will continue to live on in our family. In the things we create, in the meals we prepare, and in the confidence to try something we've never done before. When I think back to that little girl sitting nervously in this funeral home all those years ago, I realized something. My dad gave me the confidence to find my own way in the world, while always making sure I knew he was there if I needed him. And today, standing here in the very same place, I wish more than anything that he could be sitting behind me. But I know that the confidence he gave me is still here. It's part of who I am and so are so many other pieces of him. His curiosity, his determination, his creativity, his love.

Dad, thank you for making our ordinary days so extraordinary. And thank you for teaching me that there's always something new to learn, something worth creating, and someone worth helping. And thank you for always making me feel like I can do anything. There's one last story I'd like to leave you with. When Vincent went away to college, he left behind a ukulele. I remember hearing music coming from another room, just randomly on another Sunday. And there dad was, teaching himself to play Somewhere Over the Rainbow. Nobody had asked him to learn it. He simply found something that interested him, and he wanted to figure it out.

That's how I'll always remember my dad. Curious, creative, quietly confident, always finding something new to learn or make. And maybe somewhere over the rainbow, you're already working on your next project. I love you dad.