

Memorial Service of John Turtle – 1979.

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In his letter to the Corinthians, Saint Paul wrote:

“But this I say, he which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposed in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. “

In the years of his stay in our midst, he gave bountifully, not sparingly. He gave generously, with dedication, devotion and a sense of purpose, while expecting nothing in return, beyond the satisfaction that his mission has indeed fallen on fertile soil.

He gave to a constituency that is not his own and to which he was bound by no tie of blood, nationhood or history, but simply by the human bond, that most noble of bonds which brings people together, irrespective of origin, color or creed.

He gave of his knowledge, as teacher and educator. He taught all the classes in High School spanning the spectrum from the most advanced to the simplest of subjects. And that he did, notwithstanding his responsibilities as principal. Not only was he keen in making his contribution in education ramify to reach every individual student in the school, but he wanted to know his constituency well, a keynote in his success as principal. As beginning students in High School, he taught us the subject of handwriting. To this day I recall vividly, the basic principles of penmanship, which he taught us and which had been overlooked in the preceding six years of primary schooling, the ideal time when this talent should have been developed. It is no common aptitude of a teacher, to be able to leave an imprint in the minds of his students, which lasts for a lifetime.

He gave imaginatively, compassionately but yet firmly as administrator. The rules and regulations governing life within the school, whether relating to personal conduct or to the educational program, had to be observed and respected. In that, there was no compromise. He did not hesitate to discipline students, even with expulsion when they were on the verge of graduation, when they committed offenses which he considered incompatible with the moral or educational standing of the school. This he did with the conviction that the mark of BHS could be carried only by the worthy, who could do

honor to themselves, their families, their communities and their School. Discipline permeated every aspect of school life, within the classroom and outside it, including many things that are now often overlooked, like respect for the property and absolute cleanliness of the classrooms and the premises. The latter, being the responsibility of the students and not the workers at the time, he stressed as a mark of civilized man and often personally supervised the cleaning process. He posed as a model of simplicity in living and in attire, a simplicity that emanates from his puritanical heritage, but which is also reminiscent of the simplicity of life that characterized our ancestors across the ages. It is deplorable that the Lebanese of to-day have lost this simplicity. Had they not, they would have been better equipped to face these trying times of a lingering national crisis.

He gave judiciously of his spiritual belief, thus adding a valuable extra dimension to the total development of the students. The faith he preached was that which remains when form, rituals and theological details and controversies are discounted. It is the gist, which transcends all religious and sectarian barriers and which is common to all. To retrieve more adherents to his own sect, was not his objective, but without knowing, he made the Quaker spirit enter every religion and sect. It made the Maronite, Orthodox, Sunnite, Druze and Shiite a more enlightened participant within one's own sect. As he left nothing to chance, he enforced attendance at morning assemblies and Sunday morning and evening services, perhaps not so much to force the students to pray, as much as to create favorable circumstances for them to engage in spiritual thought, and then it was left for them to decide.

That and much more was John Turtle, in whose memory we are now convened.

Now that the Lord has recalled him, we pray that he will address him with the words of the parable:

"Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

As to us, we his friends and students who survive him, we find consolation as we proclaim with Job:

"The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord."

