

**Homily for the Mass of Christian Burial for Joseph P. Veasey  
St. Margaret Mary Church, South Euclid  
Saturday, November 24, 2007**

The famous and popular sculptor Michelangelo was well known in Florence and Rome in Italy in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. He had been trained as a young child how to chisel away at marble and stone to reveal what had been hidden . . . the David and the Pietá are two of his most famous works known now around the world. While he was working on the statues for Pope Julius II's tomb, the Pope asked Michelangelo to paint the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Michelangelo respectfully said 'no' explaining that he was a sculptor and not a painter. The Holy Father insisted, Michelangelo more firmly this time said 'no'. The angry Pope again told Michelangelo that it was an order from the Pope himself.



Reluctantly Michelangelo accepted the commission but with many conditions. Michelangelo and the Pope sparred many times over the project, especially when the Pope would sneak in to the chapel to see the progress of the painting and then shout at Michelangelo to hurry up; Pope Julius thought the work would not be completed before he died. The now famous ceiling was finished before the Pope's death and Michelangelo is now recognized as a world renowned sculptor and painter albeit reluctantly.



I had the chance to tell this story to Joe just a week before he died. He was having an "off day" as he called it and we were talking, well I was doing most of the talking and he was doing most of the listening. After a little small talk, there was some silence and Joe said, "I just wanted to have an impact." I took a deep breath and began to list the many, many ways he has had an impact on

people especially in these last 16 months since his diagnosis with Leukemia. I mentioned how he has touched thousands of lives from Villa Angela – St. Joseph High School to Miami University, at this his home parish St. Margaret Mary and at Oakwood Country Club, in places like Hawaii, Rome, Notre Dame, Ohio State and Peru. Joe's family in Peru will be given a video recording of this Mass next week to share in what we celebrate today. I reminded Joe that he has almost single-handedly crashed the Caring Bridge website more than a few times with close to 40,000 visitors and many, many messages of support and prayer.



I told Joe that I think his life was like that of Michelangelo in the story. Just as Michelangelo only wanted to be a sculptor, the Pope had other plans for him because of what the Pope saw in Michelangelo's talent. So too, Joe only wanted to be an architect but God had other plans for Joe because of what God saw in Joe's talent. Instead of designing and building bridges, buildings or monuments, the Divine Architect and



Builder called Joe to design and build part of the kingdom of God here on earth by using all of us as building materials. There were times when Joe was reluctant. He was too young for all of this. He wanted to have some fun, go out and hang with his friends. He just wanted to get back to Miami and finish his degree. These were Joe's simple plans but God had greater plans for Joe, a higher calling. Joe said he was listening though he didn't say anything. I took this as he was thinking about what I said. You know as well as I do that if he didn't agree, he would have objected.

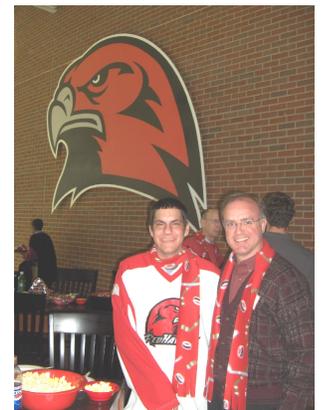
Part of the designing and building God wanted was for Joe to bring his family closer together. Now we all know this family was close, but from the first moments of the Leukemia diagnosis, this family of 6 became a family of hundreds. People near and far began to become the beams of support, the uprights of encouragement, and the tresses of prayer. Joe was designing and building a structure that will keep us stable and connected for a very long time. This was a huge responsibility for someone so young, but as the first reading from Wisdom reminds us, it is not in the number of years we are given that counts. What counts is what we do with the years we are given. The reading concludes with the line "the people saw and did not understand." How much of the last 16 months we have seen and not understood? Joe designed and built part of God's kingdom with his short life on earth. Joe would be the first person to say one of his two favorite phrases while stretching out his long fingers toward you "You don't understand" or "You gotta understand." Now we are asked to see and understand this bit of God's plan. I think most of us would agree that if our choice was to not know Joe or only know him for a short earthly time, we would choose to know him at least for a little while...for even in that short time, Joe influenced us to be the materials he used us in his designing and building God's kingdom here.



In this designing and building Joe was called to do, were two very important and key people...his parents Sonia and Jack. These two very strong, faithful and devoted people have shown us what committed love and parenting is all about. Jack and Sonia, you accepted God's love in the gift of your children. In awesome, sensational and astounding ways, you showered them with your love, patience, kindness and gentleness. Though Joe's illness challenged you to your very core and caused you the greatest of suffering when you could not prevent pain from touching him, your love for him soothed that pain. How many times Joe said to you and to us that he didn't like seeing our suffering because of what he was going through? But what Joe also realized was how much his suffering was our reason to love, to pray, to support and to do whatever we could for you and for him. Sonia, you were called to be a unique and special part of God's plan in Joe's life. Your attentiveness, care and compassion went beyond any call of duty. You are truly an example to all mothers and caregivers thinking first of others long before yourself. Joe knew and appreciated everything you did for him and knew how much all of this was hurting you the most. And now Jack and Sonia, though you have many wonderful memories to carry with you, you are now being asked to do the hardest thing in loving someone, giving your child back to God to become a saint. I believe Joe is a saint, now amongst God's holy ones.. This is the way you are to be part of the designing and building of God's kingdom. For your courage, faith and constant love of Joe, we are all most grateful and promise our support to you in the days and years to come.



Joe was blessed with 3 loving siblings; like normal siblings he loved them most of the time. John, Katie and Mary Rose, you were with Joe every step of the way, especially in the last 16 months, maybe with a visit, with a text message or a phone call. I saw Joe as the glue that held you 4 together in his designing and building of God's kingdom. You were very special to Joe and he loved you and always wanted to do anything he could for you. Mary..you and Joe were to have a special bond because of a bone marrow transplant. Your willingness and courage at such a young age are remarkable. But then again, with names like Joseph and Mary how could you not do what God wanted you to do, just like the parents of Jesus with the same names who were called to do the extraordinary.



Joe was an easy person to like and a few years ago, some classmates saw Joe as someone they liked a lot. Now known as the 'hermanos', Tim, Karl, Kava, Paul, Kevin and Joe became brothers by choice. This sort of friendship is marvelous, phenomenal and impressive. You men were also called to be part of Joe's designing and building, you are the, sorry, metal studs, the strong wall supports that held Joe up so much when he needed it. Your humor and joy at simple things is contagious and your love of Joe was truly evident in your love and actions.

Joe's faith in God was strong yet private; he showed it in his actions, not always in his words. In the Gospel today we heard that the Lord wants us to share his burden with him. Joe relied on his faith so much in this last year and 4 months. He welcomed prayer and received the Eucharist gratefully. I asked Joe a number of times if he was mad at God and he said 'no, why would I be?' I must admit, I couldn't always answer in the same way. I never heard Joe complain or saw him angry too many times, except when someone ate something he was looking forward to eating. This example of faith is a strong reminder to us to share our burden with the Lord and not give up on our faith or on God, especially when things get rough. Remember we are God's children now as St. John reminds us in the second reading. If our parents can take care of us and watch over us, how much more will God our Father protect us and be with us. Joe knew this was part of believing and trusting in God, not always understanding but having faith until the end of his earthly life as one who designs and builds the kingdom here on earth.



Joe had an exceptional and exemplary way of showing others encouragement and support. Many people remember Joe helping with homework and school projects especially in math, offering a good quick zinger, perfecting a golf swing, choosing good food at a restaurant, using the right hand movement at cornhole, selecting a fine beverage in a pub, teaching computer programs, playing a joke on his nurses at the Cleveland Clinic, joking with his new friend and oncologist Dr. Levien and so many docs, nurses and staff members at the Clinic, showing a technique on a cell phone, helping fellow students in the wood shop, ordering at Bagel and Deli in Oxford (especially his favorite 'The Urban Cowboy'), pulling a studio all-nighter or floating around the studio reviewing, critiquing and improving student projects, watching football, playing PlayStation, spending time with his grandfather and family in Peru, visiting with aunts, uncles and cousins at family parties, and who of us will ever forget that smile. In all of these ways and so many more known maybe only to you, Joe was doing the magnificent work of the Lord by designing and building the kingdom of God on earth.



Last year when Joe was so very sick and terminal, he was again thinking of others and how he could help future Miami Architecture students. He mentioned to me that he would like to establish an award in architecture at Miami University. Joe and I worked together with Miami University personnel

and last December 8, the day Joe was told he was in remission, he was able to present the first Joseph P. Veasey Award in person. Donations will hopefully fund this annual award in Joe's name for a long time and do what Joe wanted to do most: help fellow students in architecture. Joe asked me to oversee the award and the solicitation of funds should he not be able to... I am honored to do this for so thoughtful a man who has taught me so much. Yet again, this is an example of Joe thinking of others as he designed and built God's kingdom on earth.



Last year I began to refer to Joe as 'amazing Joe', I'm sure you'd

agree about that for many of you referred to him as amazing too. He soon told me I should expand my vocabulary. Last Christmas in a typical Joe move, he gave me a thesaurus and highlighted the word 'amazing' hinting that other words could be used. So I gave him a gift from his gift and created a month's calendar of 31 synonyms for 'amazing', one for every day of the month. Many of those synonyms have been included in this homily not only to describe Joe but all who have been part of this most incredible journey of designing and building God's kingdom. It is not ironic or a coincidence, but a God-incidence that the only song Joe said he wanted as part of this Mass was "Amazing Grace" because, are you ready, it was written by a pirate. That's the truth!



But in reality, this 'Grace' that we sing about is God's love and it is amazing. It is God's stunning grace that has created each of us. It is this spectacular grace that has given us faith to get through life, the good and the bad, sorrows and the joy, the sickness and the health. It is this astounding grace that sustained Joe and made him amazing and more. In seeing Joe's courage, faith, strength and love, we too have become amazing. We were the materials that Joe used to design and build what the Divine Architect guided Joe to design and build here on earth. For because of what God did through Joe, we have become a family of love and support for each other, especially for Sonia and Jack, John, Katie and Mary Rose. I think Joe eventually understood, though maybe reluctantly, that his life's calling was not to design and build with paper and pencil, with wood and bricks but to design and build all of us into a structure, a family of support for his parents and siblings.



Though his body could only hold out for a time, his spirit was alive and active until the end of his earthly life last Sunday. He died peacefully, without struggle, with a smile on his face and knowing his mom was close by to help him until he had to go. It was just like Joe had done many times before: decide and go, almost without anyone noticing. If that's the way he wanted it, then let's let him have that. Joe wanted no fanfare, no fuss, no drama...he most likely would not have liked what we did yesterday nor what

we're doing today, but really we do this in his memory for us and to comfort each other. What Joe wanted to do was to design and build and that he did carefully, with perfection and exactness just as he liked to do everything. And all Joe wanted to do was have an impact...my cousin and friend, you have had an impact!

On this Thanksgiving weekend as we grieve our loss and heaven's gain, I invite you to be thankful not for what we do not have but for what we do have. God our Father, we are most grateful for this amazing and smart young man and we will treasure him forever. I thank you for giving me the gift of walking with him, sometimes carrying him, literally, but also for the ways he carried me with his faith and trust in you. We thank you for the miracle and healing you gave Joe to be with us an extra year and 2 months, in that 8 months of remission, from first being told he was not going to live beyond a few weeks. Maybe you needed him for a bigger building project in your heavenly kingdom, but we believe you used him for a great project in your earthly kingdom. We are most thankful to have known him for a time and for being his designing and building materials. We long and look forward to our seeing our Joe again at the great Eucharist when your plan will be revealed to us all, where there will be no more tears and only joy and perfect peace in your heavenly kingdom with Christ, your angels and saints, for blessed are those who have been called to the banquet of the Lamb.



Fr. Mike Ausperk