

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Sep 25th 2015

“Take courage, all you people of the land, says the Lord!... For I am with you ...And my spirit continues in your midst; do not fear!”

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In February our former president, John Schlegel S.J., shocked and saddened everyone in the Creighton community by announcing that he had terminal pancreatic cancer which he would only treat with palliatives so he could make the best of his remaining days. Since then, he has been living the message of today’s reading from

Haggai.

“Take courage all you people of the land, says the Lord and work! For I am with you, says the Lord of hosts ... And my spirit continues in your midst: do not fear.”

A lifelong educator, Fr. Schlegel has been showing all of us how to turn our lives and our fears over to God through his public appearances, homilies posted online and numerous interviews.

I’ve become one of his devoted students. Every morning in the gym, I review the day’s garden-variety worries but until now, I’ve never made a conscious effort to turn them over to God. Now I’m trying to do so.

Last spring Fr. Schlegel returned to Creighton for the dedication of our campus Center for Service and Justice to him, the perfect living legacy. He frequently served dinner at a local homeless shelter, brought Project Homeless Connect to Creighton and strongly supported service and justice work.

I had to go, of course, since we have been friends for 40 years and saw each other almost every morning in the gym while he was president. However I feared saying goodbye because that’s what it would be. Then I saw God’s grace in action, not only in the way that Fr. Schlegel put his friends at ease but in his graceful and humorous homily to the students. God is with us. What should we fear? Love our brothers and sisters now and turn the rest over to the Lord.

A suggestion: if you resonate to this reflection: go online and listen to John Foley S.J.’s hymn “Turn to Me.” Let its reassuring message that “I am He who comforts you, who are you to be afraid” wash over you, say a prayer for Fr. Schlegel and turn your worries over to God.

This is probably the most emotional reflection I’ve ever written because I’ve been friends with Fr. Schlegel since the 1970’s. I met him as a young reporter when he was a young political science professor at Creighton. Later we were on a Chamber of Commerce committee.

When he returned as president, I saw him almost daily at 6 a.m. in the campus gym. We’d chat when he initiated the conversation or simply exchange a polite “good morning.” We were both there to work out and that’s a special bond. We’ve stayed in touch since he left.

Then the bombshell hit.

Driving to the dedication, I could taste my fear of seeing him for probably the last time. I wasn't even thinking of turning my fears over to God as I should have, just hoping I wouldn't embarrass both of us by breaking into tears when we embraced and I thanked him for 40 years of friendship.

I am grateful that today's readings have allowed me to share this story with readers who aren't close to it because we all live in fear of lots of things, especially fear of dying. I only hope that John Foley S.J.'s hymn "Turn To Me" will be with Fr. Schlegel to the end: "I am he who comforts you. Who are you to be afraid?" Thank you, Fr. Schlegel, and bless you.

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