

FUNERAL HOMILY—Deacon Vern Bechard—December 19, 2017

01. Dear Friends, first, I have to say NEVER have I been **so honoured, so sad, and so terrified** to preach at a funeral — and never have I agonized **more over a homily**. For how can one do justice to a man like DEACON VERN with mere words — a man who had such an **enormous impact** on this community—and upon all those who knew and loved him — a man who was NOTHING LESS THAN **God’s loving embrace to so many people**?
02. And so, needless to say, I’m a little nervous — so please forgive me if I fumble over my words—for I know that no matter what I say, I can never give our beloved DEACON VERN the honour he deserves—nor do justice to his legacy.
03. Whether you lose someone when they are 22 or 92—it really doesn’t make a difference in terms of the degree of pain and the sense of loss we feel — for when you lose someone you love, especially someone like DEACON VERN—someone who is **so embedded into the consciousness and the heart of this community—someone who is SO very much a part of us** — it really hurts, and pardon my language—it **really sucks** — and there’s just no getting around that.
04. And all the clichés like: **he’s in a much better place** — or he was blessed to have lived such a long and happy life—as **true as they are** — don’t really take the pain away or bring much comfort in the face of **so great a loss**.
05. And yet, it’s not so much pain and loss that brings us here together this day—but love and gratitude — love for a man who was **a living icon of God’s Love and Mercy** to all who knew him — and gratitude to God for the gift of DEACON VERN—for we have ALL been truly blessed—and are **ALL better people** for having known and loved him.
06. And so, we gather this day NOT only to pray for DEACON VERN—even though I have **no doubt whatsoever that our brother went straight to Heaven** — but ALSO, to comfort and pray for each other as we come to terms with this great loss — and to comfort and pray for those **MOST affected by his passing** — especially his beloved wife **of over 70 years**: MARY LOU—who is not only the love of DEACON VERN’S life but **his very heart as well** — his loving, caring, and supportive children: DANNY, PATRICIA, GARY, KATHY, MARY ANNE, SANDY, DAVID, & MICHELLE — his dear siblings: IVAN, BEVERLY, JEROME, GERARD, JEANETTE, & NORBERT —

and **ALL his cherished grandchildren, and great grandchildren**—who are too numerous to name here — but I have to make special mention of ANDREA—who out of great love for her grandparents, became an Angel of **care and comfort** for MARY LOU & VERN in the difficult weeks leading up to his passing.

07. And we are not only gathered here to give thanks to God for the tremendous blessing of DEACON VERN — but to celebrate **two of the greatest love stories we have been privileged to witness** — the love story between God & VERN — and between VERN & his family.
08. I have often said how love is truly manifested **most gloriously, and most beautifully**, in the midst of suffering — and this was **so true** the night that DEACON VERN passed. I was truly blessed and privileged to have been there—and I have to say that it really felt like I was treading on sacred ground.
09. And it's strange to say this, to call death a thing of beauty — but having been there that night, all I can say is that there is such a thing as a beautiful death — to see VERN'S and MARY LOU's family surround them **BOTH with such tenderness, and such love** — to see their love for DEACON VERN pour out through their tears and laughter—was truly a beautiful thing—and something **I will never forget**.
10. And in the midst of all of this, I was privileged to see a glimpse of one of the great love stories of our time — the love between VERN & MARY LOU. For, I was amazed to see that whenever MARY LOU would kiss DEACON VERN on the lips—despite his extremely weakened condition—**incredibly**, he mustered the strength to kiss her back. And although he could barely speak a word—amazingly DEACON VERN mustered up enough strength to say **as clear as day** to MARY LOU — I LOVE YOU, WITH ALL MY HEART.
11. In that moment, I couldn't help but think about Our Lord as He hung upon the Cross dying—how **every word He said was priceless—how every word cost Him more than we will ever know**. In the same way, in his weakened condition, we will never know what these words cost DEACON VERN on his death bed — I LOVE YOU, WITH ALL MY HEART. And like Our Lord's words on the Cross, these were words **were priceless**—being borne out **of great love** — a love more **powerful than suffering—a love more powerful than death**.

12. A famous Jewish psychologist named Victor Frankl talks about a love between a man and a woman **SO GREAT that it transcends even death** — a love that is based on a deep spiritual connection between two people that not even death can destroy — that night I was privileged to witness the power and the beauty of such love.
13. I'm not sure how many of you know this story, but when DEACON VERN was born he contracted a very serious infection—an infection that threatened his life — an infection for which there was no treatment at the time—and, as a result, he was not expected to live.
14. His mother, having no car at the time—took him into her arms—walked him to the local church—placed him on the Altar—and **dedicated him to Our Blessed Mother**. Shortly after that, he was healed of the infection—and, of course, **the rest is history**.
15. And just as Our Blessed Mother was instrumental at the **start of DEACON VERN'S life here on earth**—so too She was instrumental at the start of his **ETERNAL life in Heaven**.
16. For after VERN had passed away—I mentioned to MARY LOU how fitting that he died on the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe because DEACON VERN had such a **huge devotion to MARY** — and so, I have no doubt that Our Blessed Mother came that night—embraced our beloved brother in Her Arms—and welcomed him into Paradise — just as She had embraced him on that Altar at **the start of his life** some 92 years ago. And how fitting it is that DEACON VERN died the same way he lived—in **the loving embrace of Our Blessed Mother**.
17. In a few short days, we will be celebrating Christmas when Our Lord came among us as **THE living icon of the Father's Love** — when the world witnessed for the very first time **love incarnate—love itself in the flesh**. This is the truest and highest calling of every Christian — not only to become loving people—but to become **love itself in the flesh** — not only to **be LIKE Jesus Who is Love incarnate—but to BE Jesus** to a world that badly needs Him.
18. And this is the most accurate and fitting description I can give to DEACON VERN — for he truly became love itself in the flesh — and not just love itself—but **God's Love in the flesh**.

19. As Fr. Dominic put it so well, Deacon Vern was the Face of Jesus to so many. And I would add, not just the Face of Jesus—but **the hands, the feet, the eyes, the arms, and the Heart of Jesus** as well.
20. For I can talk about all the wonderfully loving things he did — but it is a rare and beautiful thing to become a **living icon of God’s Love for the world** — to not only be like Jesus—but **to BE Jesus**—to be love itself in the flesh.
21. There’s a saying that goes something like this—**YOU are the only Gospel some people will ever be exposed to**. This was our beloved DEACON VERN — he was a **living, walking Gospel**—a living testament to the saving love and mercy of God — and we have ALL been truly blessed because of this—because we have ALL experienced **God’s loving embrace THROUGH HIM**.
22. And just like his name sake, ST. JOSEPH—DEACON VERN was a man of action—a man who let his actions speak for him—a man who didn’t just talk the talk—but walked the walk. And even more importantly—a man **who walked God’s talk**.
23. This is why I chose the Beatitudes for the Gospel reading — because just as the Beatitudes are at the heart of the Gospel—the Beatitudes are ALSO at the heart of who DEACON VERN is — **being meek, humble, and merciful—being poor in spirit, pure in heart, and a man of peace — being the beauty and the power of the Beatitudes in the flesh**. And blessed are we who mourn for him because it means that we have been **truly privileged** to have been part of his amazing story in some way.
24. Of all the wonderful and beautiful things DEACON VERN has done — **the most wonderful, and the most beautiful**—is the love he **poured out to ALL his family**—especially his beloved MARY LOU. On the night he passed—one of VERN’S daughters said it perfectly—**the best thing a father can do for his children is to love their mother** — what a beautiful description of our beloved DEACON VERN.
25. And this is why we can’t honour VERN’S story **without honouring MARY LOU’S story as well** — and why they are BOTH forever linked by a love that is **greater than suffering—greater than death**.
26. They say behind every great man is a great woman—and I can’t think of a couple who that applies to more perfectly than VERN & MARY LOU — except, in their case, I wouldn’t use the word **BEHIND but BESIDE** — **BESIDE** every great man is a great woman—because they were true partners in

every sense of the word — the two of them being of **one mind, one heart, and one flesh**.

27. And it's **rare and beautiful thing** to have someone become love itself in the flesh—but to have **A COUPLE** become love itself in the flesh is **an even rarer and more beautiful thing**. Maybe that's why it was love at first sight for both of them — because they were both drawn to the **embodiment of God's Love they saw in each other**.
28. DEACON VERN'S **great love affair with God** has reached its ultimate climax where he continues **to be love itself** — while his great love affair with MARY LOU—the great love story between them—continues.
29. Their love story looks a little different now—but it continues — and it too will reach its ultimate climax (**and have the happiest of all possible endings**) when they are both forever united in Paradise.
30. Once I parked in VERN'S spot and a parishioner jokingly said to me: **Who do you think you are parking in DEACON VERN'S spot — those are some really big shoes to fill**. Although they were teasing me—they were of course right — those are some pretty big shoes to fill — and none of us **can fill them**—nor should any of us even try.
31. And so, MARY LOU, just as no one can **ever fill VERN'S SHOES** — no one can ever fill the immense void his passing has left **in your heart**—no one except God Himself — but please know that you are not alone—we love you—and **we are ALL here for you**. You have a large family—but remember **WE are also your family** — and again, we are all here for you.
32. The love you shared with VERN is so strong and so powerful—that I have **absolutely no doubt** that not even death can separate you — and even though I know VERN is now enjoying his eternal reward in Heaven — I also have **no doubt** that somehow, **even now**—his arms are around you giving you one of those big bear hugs he's famous for — and that **even now** he's whispering in your ear, and to your heart, those priceless words he spoke to you on his death bed: I LOVE YOU—WITH ALL MY HEART. Amen.