

Archbishop Emeritus John J. Myers' Memorial Mass Homily
Bishop Emeritus Arthur Serratelli
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Once the archbishop of Paris told a story during his homily about a group of boys in Orleans, France, back in 1939.

The boys were out drinking and when they passed a church, they decided to have some fun.

They dared each other to go inside the church and confess a madeup list of terrible sins to the priest in the confessional.

One of them, a Jewish boy named Aaron, took up the challenge.

With a grin on his face, he entered the dark confessional and began to rattle off a list of sins.

But the old priest caught on quickly. When the lad finished, the priest gave him a simple penance.

He told him to go up the altar, kneel before the large image of Jesus crucified and say three times, "Jesus, I know you died for me. But I really don't care at all."

When he came out, the other boys told him that he had to do the penance to complete the challenge.

Not to be mocked by his friends, Aaron went straight to the altar, looked up and shouted for all to hear: "Jesus, I know you died for me. But I really don't care at all." A second time, he repeated it. And then for the third time, he began, "Jesus, I know you died for me. But I really don't ..." He could not go on.

The archbishop finished the story by saying that the following year, in August of 1940, Aaron was baptized and took the name "Jean-Marie."

And then the archbishop, Cardinal Lustiger, leaned over the pulpit and said, "That boy is now standing here, speaking to you."

What great power there is in the priesthood!

A dedicated priest in the confession leads an unbelieving youth to Jesus crucified and his life is changed forever.

Is not this the mission of every priest: to lead others to Jesus who is waiting, eager to change unbelief to belief and sin to grace?

The priest can accomplish his mission because he is anointed, as Jesus Himself was, with the Holy Spirit.

For 54 years, the Holy Spirit worked through the ministry of Archbishop Myers: 25 years as a priest, 14 years as bishop in Peoria, 15 as the bishop of this great archdiocese.

He served God and his neighbor in health and in sickness—tirelessly and generously to bring others to Christ.

At the heart of his ministry was family. He loved his family. He also spoke so affectionately of his own mom and dad and his whole family.

And, he looked at those entrusted to his pastoral care as his family to love.

As St. Augustine advised all bishops, Archbishop Myers shepherded the faithful by providing a good pasture for them, nourishing them with the truth—in season and out of season.

In the clear and crisp teaching of his many pastoral letters and statements, he offered not his opinions but the unchanging teaching of the Church to guide us.

As he worked to make the beauty of this cathedral more clearly visible, he worked even harder, as he said in his coat of arms, to make the mystery of the Church shine forth in the life of his people.

As time passes, the memory of his many gifts will inevitably fade: his gift of administration; his service on national and international committees; his love of Catholic schools; his care for Catholic Charities; his zeal for vocations and seminary formation; his staunch, unflinching apologia of our Catholic faith.

But there are two of his gifts that those of us who knew him well will not forget.

First and foremost was his kindness.

Archbishop Myers knew, as Hebrews tell us, that every priest, from pope to most recently ordained, *every priest*—even himself—is a man taken from among men, able to be compassionate because he, too, is a weak, frail vessel of divine grace.

He was truly compassionate with others.

What goodness, what gentleness he had when dealing with those in difficult situations, especially his brother priests. Unforgettable!

And, secondly, there was his joy.

With Jesus in the synagogue of Nazareth, he said every day: “The Spirit of the Lord has anointed me to bring good news.”

No matter how tense, how difficult the moment, he let the oil of gladness given in his ordination, spill over into his words and deeds.

To be with him was always to enjoy laughter and good humor.

As the years passed and his body weakened, his joy remained strong and his hope to be with the Lord increased.

How appropriate this memorial Mass for him on this feast of the Our Lady of the Rosary.

He taught by example how powerful a prayer the rosary is and what a loving mother Mary is to the Church.

On Sept. 24, attended to by those who love him, Archbishop Myers slipped quietly from our midst into the arms of the Good Shepherd, who came to take home this servant of his.

May the all-loving Lord who died and rose for our salvation, the most compassionate Lord who has gone to prepare a place for each of us, the Lord who sees all the good Archbishop Myers did—the faith he kept, the love he shared, the sufferings he endured—now bring him into his true home in heaven.