



Catholic New York Editor's Report - June 19, 2008

A Great Voice Who Listened, Too

By JOHN WOODS

The world of Catholic radio and communications, and the pages of this newspaper, lost a great voice with the sudden death of Father Paul Keenan last week (Obituary, Page 36).

His monthly column for CNY, "Spiritual Matters," which he had written since September 2001, was only a small part of his ministry, but it was in keeping with the person and priest he sought to be. His words were upbeat, encouraging and offered readers a point of entry to approach their faith and God. True to form, he rarely made himself the focus. He left room for the reader to use the stories and examples he told as an invitation to reflect on the underlying meaning of what he wrote. (As an aside, he was an editor's dream: his columns were always on time, to length and required very little editing.)

The following excerpt from his very first column for CNY is a good example of how he set a place for the reader. It came after Father Paul explained the story from Matthew's Gospel in which Peter, in imitation of Jesus, attempts to walk on water. "What is more," he wrote, "can we learn to look for evidence of God's help in our daily lives? Those glimmers of inspiration, that Scripture passage that runs through our head, that person who unexpectedly pops in with a suggestion—are they just coincidences, or are they the hand of God? Peter gets his answer, and we get ours as well—but often we fail to see it as God's answer to our prayer."

Though he was a prolific writer, who in recent years had published five books and also written a column and an inspirational blog for the archdiocesan Web site, radio was his first love, from the time he was a boy growing up in Kansas City, Mo. He brought his deep, resonant voice to the airwaves of major New York City commercial stations such as WABC, where he co-hosted "Religion on the Line" for 14 years, and to WOR, where he was the host of "As You Think" for a decade. When he moved to the Catholic Channel on Sirius Satellite Radio two years ago, he brought along the "As You Think" name.

Father Paul, for many years, served as director of radio ministry in the archdiocesan Office of Communications.

"He loved radio," said Joseph Zwilling, archdiocesan director of communications and general manager of the Catholic Channel. "Being able to incorporate it into his ministry was important to him." His Catholic Channel show allowed Father Paul "to be there for people" who might not come to see a priest face to face, Zwilling said.

He mentioned a recent show in which Father Paul took a call from a listener who was upset because her attempts at finding meaningful volunteer work were met with resistance and it seemed that all she could offer were her prayers. "Father Paul, in talking with her, pointed out that maybe that (prayer) was what God was calling her to do. By the end of the call you could hear the difference in the woman's voice," Zwilling said.

"Father Paul was there for her. That's what he loved most about his show."

Father Paul also made a difference in the lives of those with whom he worked. Emily Marlow, the producer of Father Paul's show on the Catholic Channel, said he was her mentor. She told me she learned a lot from the way he treated each caller with the utmost respect and by how he listened intently to what they said. "He was the best interviewer," she said.

When Ms. Marlow began working with Father Paul, she had little radio experience, but she was quickly promoted from phone screener to producer. With his breadth of experience, she said, it would have been easy for Father Paul to pull rank, but instead "he let me do my thing."

"He trusted me," she said.

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