

A. E. Pete Vandegrift January 14, 2013 Nigel Taber-Hamilton

How can you sum up a person's life in a few minutes of a homily, let alone a 60 minute reception? The answer is that you can't – all of us (ALL OF US) have life stories that can easily fill a book....and deserve to have such.

What we can do – together – is to remember markers: things that have been important for us, and for Pete, in this great journey we call life.

Pete was a husband and father and lover of animals; he was a devout Christian and an Episcopalian; he was an engineer, a person who loved the outdoors; he was a soldier and a life-long scout, and he was, always a student, especially of his faith, hence the 1 Corinthians reading, which talks about the importance of understanding our faith and keeping it.

As I have, on occasion, reflected on my own death I wonder what people will remember me for! That, I know, is a question that each of us will ask of ourselves at some time or another. So here's what I will always remember about Pete:

1. That silver beaver pin he wore, and the fact that he always had a pen-knife handy!
2. That he was proud of his ancestry – and never failed to correct those neophytes like myself who wanted to add an “r” in the middle of Vandegrift!
3. That he deeply loved his family, even if he could be a real grouch sometimes. I recall visiting him in Providence a couple of days after his heart surgery. They give you red, heart-shaped cushions to hug against your chest as a reminder not to spread your arms (and dislodge the mending bones). Before I got into the room the cushion sailed in front of me – thrown by Pete because everything wasn't the way he thought it should be!
4. That he had an extensive library of Christian literature, and was generous in giving bits of it away (I still use his copy of the “Book of Occasional Services”)
6. While I have known him he was deeply fascinated in current events in the Holy Land, feeling that the Israelis get bad press, but was open to hearing other perspectives.
7. That he loved bible study - and in his later years hosted a weekly men's bible study group, mostly from St. Augustine's.
8. That he was a passionate man, especially about his family, his interests, and his faith, becoming a Oblate of our local Benedictine monastery in the last

few years.

9. And, lastly, I will always remember where he sat in church! Perhaps we need a plaque that said "Pete sat here"! Though then we'd be putting plaques all over the pews for the rest of you!

This is both a hard day and a joyful day for those of us who have known Pete. Hard because he's gone, joyful both because of the gifts he gave us – primarily the gift of himself – and because of his deep faith that now he will be with God.

So while today is a day to remember who he was as a person we also remember/proclaim who he is: a child of God who has been embraced into that place & state of being that is with God

John's gospel uses the metaphor of "dwelling places" to describe that place and state. A dwelling place is somewhere we live, where we do more than simply exist but have awareness, presence, vitality. Elsewhere in that Gospel Jesus tells these same disciples that they are not simply followers but friends, a message intended for us, too. This "dwelling place" isn't cold and emotionless but quite the opposite, filled with the warmth of family & friends.

John knew that he needed to use metaphor to explain what Jesus was talking about – and, in fact, we, too, must talk in metaphors. So here's mine: my vision of Pete now is that he is, now, gathered around a camp fire with many friends under the open sky of a warm summer evening. The lightening bugs of his youth are out, the fire blazing, and he and they celebrate the joy of God's creation while he and they wait to be joined by those they love.

And that's where we must leave him – in that place of joy and peace that is to be with God – giving thanks for his time with us, and letting him go from among us.

May he rest in peace, and rise in glory! Amen.