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(Based on the eulogy given at Father Michael's funeral, June 1, 2017)

On the anniversary of his ordination Saint Augustine, one of Father Mike's favorite authors from the early Church, spoke to the gathered congregation a sentence he took seriously and embodied. "For you I am your bishop; with you I am a Christian."

Father Michael was not a bishop nor did he ever aspire to be one, but he was a priest for many people in so many places. In his home diocese in Sicily where he was born, he obediently served as priest and teacher. Later, when he came to the United States to be with his parents who had emigrated here, Father Mike was a faithful priest at the parishes of Saint Jerome and Saint John of Rochester. He assisted in parishes like Holy Spirit, Most Precious Blood, Annunciation, Holy Trinity, Saint Paul's and also the Motherhouse of the Sisters of Mercy to name a few. Fr. Mike generously baptized, witnessed marriages, and was present at special events of family, friends, parishioners and former students. Members of the Italian community called upon Father Mike to preach or lead them in prayer for special occasions or to the bedside of a loved one to administer the sacrament of the sick. He committed himself to share with joy the gift of priesthood for others.

For Father Mike, a Christian was called to be fully human thus giving a face to Jesus' own attitude of loving service. With the community of Saint John Fisher College he was "the Christian" who served with a focused commitment to "goodness, discipline, knowledge." In addition to preparing his classes and meticulously correcting papers, Father Mike accomplished this with a ready smile, an invitation to enjoy a cup of espresso, and a humble silence as he listened to the "other" sitting with him in his office. His door was always open to a student, faculty or staff person with an occasional loud invitation from behind his desk to "come in, sit down, and I will prepare you a cup of espresso." More than once I listened to him encourage a wayward student to attend class, submit an overdue paper, or work harder while he was pouring the nervous student a cup of espresso or reaching into his desk drawer for a tin of cookies.

I was lucky enough to hear stories about his family young and old. He would eat with them each week; travel to see his sister and brother-in-law in Belgium each year; and just a year ago returned to home diocese in Sicily to celebrate his 50th anniversary of ordination. For them all he was a loving son, brother, uncle and great-uncle. Michael's face would light up as he told of the latest trick he pulled on them or when detailing the excitement of the birth of a new member to the family. With both family and his many friends the cup of espresso was ever present. It was a cup richly symbolic of a cup overflowing with Christian love and joy.

Personally, these days following his brief illness and death have presented an opportunity to ask myself why Fr. Michael was such a gift to me as priest and friend. We knew each other for nearly 40 years and have worked together part time and, later, full time as colleagues at Saint John Fisher for better than 25 of those years. Our almost daily cup of espresso provided time for wonderful conversations. We usually took care of business and current political and social issues in a few minutes. (He did not care to dwell too long on the latest political news items or social upheaval.) The rest of the time we talked about books and their authors. He was an avid reader (in English, French, and Italian) and read deeply in areas of interest. Once I let him borrow a movie about Oscar Wilde. For the next year he read all of Wilde's plays, books, and essays. We both enjoyed the works of Romano Guardini, a German theologian with Italian roots. Fr. Mike and I had read *The Lord* (a life of Christ) when we were preparing for priesthood. This forged another bond that prompted us to recommend to each other our favorite Guardini books. In the last year of his life, the three volumes of letters (in French) of Vincent Van Gogh was the focus of his readings and meditation. I knew of Van Gogh as a great painter, but Fr. Mike showed me that it was Van

Gogh, the inner man, who painted what he saw with his heart. I will miss those inspiring tutorials on art, music, and literature.

During the past few weeks I have been reading a book called *The Power of Silence*. As I thought about its deeper message, it struck me that it was Fr. Mike's gift. The power of his gentle silence allowed me and others to speak of our joys and our struggles. He was silent so he could listen with his heart. He often spoke of living alone so he could read, listen to music, and pray in the silence of his house. This prepared him, I believe, to listen better to those who sought out his advice and his company. We felt "listened to."

As a Scripture scholar, Fr. Mike knew well the Book of Proverbs. This collection of wisdom speaks of friends and friendship. A true friend, in time, becomes a brother or sister; a relationship forged in sweat and tears rooted in a willingness to love without condition or judgment. The one who finds such a friend has found a treasure.

Fr. Mike was such a treasure to so many: family, staff, faculty, students, parish members, friends! We will miss his gentle smile and listening heart.

Rev. Dr. William Graf
Chair, Department of Religious Studies

Faculty Essays

The Trouble with Tribble: The Limitation of a Feminist Biblical Interpretation

In her book, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*, Phyllis Tribble describes the story of the unnamed concubine in the Book of Judges as depicting "the horrors of male power, brutality, and triumphalism, of female helplessness, abuse, and annihilation" (65). While I understand and fully accept that there are patriarchal and misogynistic elements in the text, I find Tribble's feminist interpretation and assessment of the story problematic because it loses sight of one of the Bible's central revelatory messages; namely, that power, brutality, helplessness and abuse are not gender-specific; rather, they are the result of human selfishness and sin. From an ethics perspective, Judges 19-20 dramatically illustrates the random, chaotic nature of evil in the abuse of power and the damage to the victims regardless of sex. The distinction lies in how individuals deal with the threat and what their response tells us about their character.

The stage is set in the first verse of Chapter 19: "In those days, when there was no king in Israel..." Mulling over these few words, the imagination suddenly pictures what they could literally mean. Central authority is non-existent in Israel. The social order is crumbling, and, consequently, anything goes. Reflecting on our own time, that's a pretty scary thought. After setting the atmosphere, the narrative introduces the central characters: a Levite from the hill country of Ephraim and his concubine from Bethlehem in Judah (Judg. 19:1). The social status of the pair is significant. In ancient Israel, Levites served as priests and teachers at local shrines, indicating a superior rank and piety from ordinary Israelites. A concubine was a woman who lived with a man but had a lower social status than a wife; however, in the story the Levite is referred to as "the husband" of the concubine (19:3) and the "son-in-law" of the woman's father (19:5). Later in the story the Levite is also referred to as the woman's "master" (19:26), all of which confirm her inferior, subservient status to the man.