

Homily, Memorial Mass for  
BISHOP RICHARD J. GARCIA, DD, STL  
July 23, 2018; St. Anthony Church

Dear Friends, we are gathered to pray for and give thanks to God for the beautiful life of our beloved former auxiliary bishop of 9 years, Bishop Richard J. Garcia. He died on July 11 at the relatively young age of 71. It was shocking how his seemingly robust health deteriorated so rapidly over the past 4 months. It caught him by surprise, too; but as a man of deep faith and prayer, he was ready for whatever the Lord wished. As the 1st reading reminds us: "The just man, though he die early, shall be at rest..an unsullied life (is) the attainment of old age...He reached the fulness of a long career, for his soul was pleasing to God." When I last visited Bishop Rich a month ago, we bantered openly about the probability of his passing to the fullness of life fairly soon. I said, "Rich, this looks to be your ticket home to the Father's house; I'm 10 years older but it looks like you're going to beat me there; that's not fair." He laughed: "Yes, I think I'm going to beat you." And he did. But he will be sorely missed here.

There is a funny consequence to his passing. At Bishop Rich's funeral in Salinas last Thursday, some of us bishops joked about artichokes. Grown abundantly in the Diocese of Monterey, artichokes have been the cause of laughter ever since Bishop Garcia's installation as Bishop of Monterey on January 30, 2007. On that occasion, at the lunch for the bishops and family prior to the Mass, when Bishop Rich made his remarks, he called attention to the packet of memorabilia of the Diocese of Monterey that each bishop would receive. He apologized that the packets did not each contain a couple of artichokes like they had intended, since the new crop was delayed. I was then invited to say a few words. I, of course, wished Bishop Rich well in Monterey but also expressed my sadness that Sacramento and I were losing a much loved and effective Auxiliary Bishop. I then turned to Archbishop Monsalve, the Apostolic Nuncio, and, tongue in cheek, strongly complained of the injustice - that Sacramento was getting nothing in return for our loss; that at the very least we should get a sack of artichokes.

Well, the place broke out in great laughter. And every speaker thereafter joked about artichokes. And Rich himself loved the banter and kept it going. Throughout these 11 subsequent years, every time Bishop Rich would come to Sacramento, which was fairly often, he brought me a sack of artichokes, if in season. With his passing, I'll have to shop for my own artichokes. Each time will bring back fond memories. And so it will be, surely, with each of

you. Each will have precious memories of this down-to-earth, simple, friendly man of God. Bishop Rich was a kind and gentle soul; always positive, encouraging and affirming. He had time for you, whoever you were. Non judgmental, he seemed always to see the good in people; sought to bring out the best. He connected with people. He was everybody's friend. His frequent robust embraces expressed this well. I heard one Sacramento priest at the funeral say: "there was not a mean bone in him." Indeed, not.

You will recall that his episcopal motto was, "En El vivimos" (In Him we live), taken from today's 2nd reading from Acts 17:28, where we hear St. Paul proclaim: "In Him we live and move and have our being." That ideal and goal - striving to be in Christ, to live in Christ - clearly shaped Rich's life and ministry. If one lives in Christ, then you will be striving to reproduce Christ's love and friendship and mercy in your own attitudes, in your life and ministry. I think that is what we saw in Bishop Rich; and also what the Diocese of Monterey clearly experienced.

The Monterey obituary included this paragraph: "Bishop Garcia was known for his very personable, welcoming and friendly demeanor. As a spiritual shepherd, he had a concern for the poor, the incarcerated, migrant workers and immigrant communities. He always had time for priests, deacons, religious, seminarians and the people of God throughout the Diocese of Monterey. Bishop Garcia had a special delight for children and was most compassionate to those with special needs. He was proud of his Mexican-American heritage and the diversity of cultures that are represented in the Church." I think we could all say "amen" to those sentiments. In spite of a sense of great loss at the funeral, there was a beautiful outpouring of love and gratitude for Bishop Rich's loving ministry of 11 plus years as their bishop. It was beautiful to see - yet not surprising for us who knew him here in Sacramento.

All would agree that Bishop Garcia was notably more touchy, freely, huggy than I. Right? But I think we complemented each other well. When I petitioned the Holy Father to appoint an auxiliary bishop, I was asked to propose three candidates. I purposely placed Bishop Garcia first on the list - and was ever grateful to God that the Holy Father appointed my first choice. It doesn't always happen that way. We were blessed. Bishop Garcia brought a different face and feel to the Bishop's Office. We needed that. He also brought a relaxed style that at first rattled some people. For example, his common vesture at the office was a multi-colored Pendleton jacket/shirt worn over his clerical shirt, not a black suit coat! It didn't bother him at all that he was "out of uniform". Staff and visitors alike had to get used to burly embraces.

You could say that he wore his episcopal dignity lightly. He didn't let it change him. He remained himself, down-to-earth, authentic - which, of course, endured him to all.

Although I sought to involve Bishop Garcia in absolutely all aspects of diocesan life and ministry, he was asked to give special time and attention to the north state, to visiting our Catholic schools, to a supportive presence to youth ministry, Hispanic and other ethnic ministries, to vocations, Catholic Charities, as well as to immigrants, migrants, the incarcerated and the poor and marginalized, in general. Over time, he took on a role of overseeing vicars and department heads on diocesan staff. As my health failed, Bishop Garcia also got more involved in diocesan administration. Plus, he had a role in the other things going on - the preparation for the third Diocesan Synod, the restoration of the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament, a successful diocesan capital campaign and the sexual abuse crisis. All these involvements were a great preparation for his appointment as the Diocesan Bishop of Monterey. Sacramento was good for Bishop Garcia - and he was good for us.

For one whose motto in life is, "in Him we live", the Gospel of Matthew 25 draws forth some very practical consequences: "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me... Lord, when did I do these things?...Whatever you did for these least brothers of mine, you did for me..." We clearly experienced Bishop Rich striving to do all these things, didn't we; and helping us all to do likewise? So it is not hard for us to imagine Jesus beckoning lovingly to Rich when he breathed his last, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

We all hope to hear this same loving summons one day, don't we? "Come, blessed of my Father!" May Bishop Rich's life-example and passing encourage us to renew our own grounding in Jesus: "In Him we live; en El vivimos." In the words of the psalm: "The Lord is my light and my salvation...One thing I seek, to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life...Your presence, O Lord, I seek." Today, in union with the sacrifice of Jesus, we commend the gentle soul of Bishop Garcia to our loving God - to his eternal reward. From the Father's house Bishop Rich will continue a priestly ministry of interceding for us, the pilgrim Church, still on the way. But we are not without hope: for "I believe that I shall see the bounty of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord with courage; be stouthearted, and wait for the Lord."