

Homily at the Funeral Mass of Frederick E. Crowe, S.J., April 17 2012

Delivered by Robert M. Doran, S.J.

‘What we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is.’

I wish to thank the Province Committee that is so diligent in looking after funeral arrangements for their beloved brother Jesuits for very kindly asking me to preach the homily at the funeral of my friend and long-time collaborator Frederick Crowe.

Two biblical passages for this homily and this liturgy came to mind shortly after I woke up on Easter Monday morning, having gone to bed with the knowledge that Fred had passed on to God on Easter Sunday. They became the second and third readings that we have just heard: the reading from the first letter of John and the reading from John’s Gospel. The opening reading from Wisdom was suggested by Gordon Rixon, and very appropriately so. My remarks are based on the scripture readings and on the Fred Crowe that I lived and worked with for over twenty years.

Most people know Fred Crowe as the faithful and relentlessly persistent preserver, promoter, and interpreter of the work of Bernard Lonergan. There is a widespread international community, one that continues to grow almost daily in this age of electronic communication, that recognizes its tremendous debt of

gratitude to Frederick Crowe. An enormous amount of very fruitful research in philosophy, in theology, in economics, and in many other fields is being done that was made possible because Fred Crowe started very early collecting and then editing materials written by Father Lonergan and preserving those materials faithfully and carefully. I worked with him for twenty years on the Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan, but by the time we started that project Fred had already assembled most of the materials that would be relevant for the collection.

People also know Fred as a trustworthy and at the same time creative systematic theologian, renowned for his courses especially on the Trinity, courses that were crafted with a deft blend of systematic precision and pastoral sensitivity.

But in addition to his fidelity to his friend and mentor Bernard Lonergan and the responsibility that he took to make Lonergan's work available, and in addition to his faithful stewardship regarding the central mysteries of our faith, which he taught with such diligence for so many years, there is something else that I want to bring home in this short homily. I want to stress the way in which, as Fred grew older, his attention turned more and more, not to the past that he had labored for so many years to understand, not even to the exegesis of more and more texts of Bernard Lonergan – though he never lost interest in either of these sources of his own wisdom – but rather to the future. The more he realized that his own life and work were drawing to an end – and I witnessed that realization incarnate in him

over the last couple of years that he worked at the Lonergan Research Institute – the more he pondered the tasks that are in front of us today as we move into the uncharted territory that fascinated him so much in his later years. If someone had asked me ten or fifteen years ago, What have you learned from Frederick Crowe? I would have responded in terms of our common work on Lonergan. Today I respond to that question in a far more nuanced manner, with the conviction that perhaps Fred’s principal legacy to many of us, even beyond the fact that we owe to him the preservation of Lonergan’s legacy – and we would not have that legacy were it not for Fred – is the orientation that he took to the future, the conviction that he embodied regarding how we, and especially the church, are to move into that future. As *he* grew older, his mind and his interests literally grew younger, more in touch with the new things that God is doing in our world. Motivating that opening onto the future was the Christian hope expressed in the letter of John. ‘What we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is.’

Some of what I am talking about is reflected in language that Fred started using in the 1980s about the church: about the church not just as the teaching church, but also and especially as the learning church, as a church that is happy at every level to learn especially from those that are somehow ‘other.’ Some of this direction in Fred’s orientation became clear to me in the essays that he wrote

around the time of Father Lonergan's death in 1984, essays especially on the presence of the one whom we know as the Holy Spirit in people of the other religions of the world. This is a belief that he was deeply convinced of and deeply committed to. The Second Vatican Council had affirmed the presence of the Holy Spirit in the world's religions. That affirmation was repeated by Pope John Paul II. But I think Fred started the work of trying to understand that doctrinal affirmation. He started asking the question, How can this be? How are we to understand this? And he responded in a way that is unique and that cuts through many of the difficulties in other attempts to answer such questions. I believe his work in these directions will last. The clearest, perhaps the starkest, indication of what I am talking about appears at the end of the last book he published – at the age of 90, by the way – *Christ and History*, when he turned again to the relation of Christian faith to the other religions of the world and admitted frankly that we simply do not know the answer to the question of the final relationship of Christianity to the other world religions. The reason we don't know that answer is that we are working it out, and it is our responsibility to work it out, and when we finally do work it out it may be very different from what we may have anticipated when we began to address the question.

This is not the time and place to belabor Frederick Crowe's extremely rich theology, whether of the Trinity or of grace or of world religions or of anything

else. But I think this is an appropriate time and place to bear witness to a spirit of trusting adventure that quietly and unobtrusively took over his mind and heart as he grew into old age. And it is definitely appropriate to say something about the inner sources of that ever new, ever revitalized, spirit of adventure and exploration.

I don't think this trusting openness to the new and the unexpected came easily to Fred. I think he arrived at his boldness, which, however bold, was always faithful to the teaching of the church, through struggle with his own insecurities and propensity to anxiety. It was in that struggle that he found the Lord: the Lord who had called him into religious life in 1936, the Lord who had led him to work with one of the great theologians of the past century and preserve his work, the Lord who had inspired him to be the example of humble service and dedicated labor that he was to all of us over so many years. Frederick Crowe was opened to the radical uncertainty of the future as something to be embraced and welcomed because in the depths of his heart he saw just how much the Father has loved us, with a love so great that we are called God's children because by God's grace that is what we really are. He was opened to the radical uncertainty of the future because he took literally the next words in the first letter of John: 'we are now God's children, but it is not yet clear what we shall become.' He welcomed the radical uncertainty of the future and taught us to do so because in faith he did know

one thing: ‘What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is.’

Again, Fred was able to be so inclusive of his brothers and sisters of other religious traditions and communities, not because he was naturally predisposed in this way but because he believed the Lord’s words that in the Father’s house there are many rooms. He never once stopped believing the further words in the same passage from John’s Gospel to the effect that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, but, in a manner similar to the Second Vatican Council – and perhaps he learned this from the Council – he knew that this means that the mystery of redemption embodied in the law of the cross, embodied in forgiveness of injuries and transcendence of violence, is nothing peculiar to Christians. It is found everywhere where the promptings of the Holy Spirit are acknowledged and consented to. It is *revealed* as the word of God and the key to the reign of God in the revelation given by Jesus, but it is something that the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus, is working everywhere. Fred was able to open himself and to open us confidently on a very uncertain future precisely because he prayed, and understanding was given him; he called upon God, and the spirit of wisdom came to him. He preferred her to scepters and thrones, and he accounted wealth as nothing in comparison with her. All good things came to him along with her, and

he rejoiced in them all. He learned without guile, and he imparted without grudging, for he had received the wisdom that obtained for him friendship with God.

He knew that the same gift and promise is offered to all. The more I absorb his contribution to the enterprise that he and I have both been a part of, the more convinced I become that this wisdom and the freedom that it brings to face the future unafraid of what it holds will be Frederick Crowe's greatest legacy to that future itself. It will be a legacy left to those who knew him personally and remember how he lived it. But even more, and certainly more important, it will, I trust, be a legacy to the wider church as the church enters ever more fully into the mystery of the 'other' in its midst and discovers there, discerns there, the workings of the same Spirit who spoke through the prophets of Israel and descended upon Jesus at his baptism and was poured forth in the birth of the church at Pentecost. It would not surprise me if a central prayer of Fred Crowe's was 'Come, Holy Spirit,' for it is clear to me that Fred's work enables the rest of us to pray that prayer with deeper appreciation, with renewed hope, and with an ever more abiding trust in the Father who gives the Spirit to all whom the Father loves and calls to be children of God.

And so for this we give thanks and praise God, and commend our brother and friend to the God whom Fred knew intimately as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

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