

T.F., the Model Man

On Saturday, September 26, 2009, at around 2:45 in the afternoon, T.F. Monti went home to his eternal home. Ninety four years of earthly living and loving was transformed into an eternity of living.

How can you capture a life of living, loving, giving and serving in a few short minutes? How can you put a lifetime of inspiration, example, dedication and even devilment into a few short sentences?

T.F. was born on June 29th, 1915. Of course, it is the Feast of St. Peter and Paul – two of the big hitters in the Church. T.F. was a larger than life figure at Our Lady of the Gulf Church in Bay St. Louis. in the community and in the workplace.

He had a keen eye for the girls but it was often mixed with sadness. His first girlfriend died of a heart attack in California. His second girlfriend was killed by a car. But his third girlfriend was a charmer and a keeper. He kept calling Mary Benvenuti for six months before she would date him. Finally he wooed her with his charm and twinkling eye.

The doors of his home were always open, open to friend and stranger; to neighborhood kids and their friends. They were always open to priests too, especially the Irish priests who were adopted by T.F. and Mary as their American parents. A priest could call up and put his name in the pot or just drop by – no need for invitations.

Even though he was an only child, T.F. never met a stranger. It didn't matter where he worked, who he worked with or what they did or where he went – work, church or store. They were all part of his extended family.

Of course, T.F. had his own crosses to carry. He fought depression for many years but thanks to his faith and the guidance of his psychiatrist, he overcame it. He carried the cross of the death of his grandson, Mike to be followed a week later by the death of his daughter Mimi and her husband C.J. and then, a short time later, the death of his soul mate and best friend, Mary.

Of course, so many people knew T.F. through his famous collection of models, models of war and peace. He was profiled in Gulf Pine Catholic some months ago as well as in the SunHerald and WLOX TV. He had his own battle scars but also his special moments of peace and tranquility. His moments of peace and tranquility will now last an eternal lifetime.

But most especially, the models man was a model man; a man of faith, a man of trust, a man of prayer, a man of love, a man of hope, a man for others.

T.F. spent the last few months of his life at Dunbar Village Nursing Home in Bay St. Louis. He didn't have to make any new friends there. They were all old friends that he had known for decades. The residents and staff loved him. In fact, a few days before he died, one of the staff members who knew he had a famous hymn, went into his room sat down beside his bed and sung his favorite hymn – “City of God.” It was also fitting that that same hymn began his funeral Mass.

We can often measure the impact of a person's life by the lives of their offspring. In the case of T.F. Monti, the apple of goodness, inner beauty, faith, dedication, inspiration, and love fell into their laps and they continue to live its fruits. Night and day, 24/7, children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren held vigil at his bedside during his final days.

When I think of people like T.F. and his generation, I realize their greatness in faith, in love, in generosity. They may not have had the trappings of life growing up but they had the mantle of love on their shoulders. They appreciated each gift, each blessing, each person, each opportunity to make life better and richer for everyone who crossed their path.

So, in the words of his funeral closing hymn, the “Song of Farewell. T.F. “May the choirs of angels come to greet you. May they speed you to paradise. May the Lord enfold you in his mercy. May you find eternal life.”