

FLAPS UP, GEAR UP, READY FOR THE LAST ASCENT

Our homily for the first Saturday of the Trinity Season, this day the Church in this place has chosen to remember the Faith that God gave His servant Byron Wayne Rosenbaum, is taken from the last readings we shared together. Hear again the Word:

*All of you behold what kind of sacrificial love He has given to us, the Father, that children of God we might be called, and we are!*¹

Jane, Wes, Gary, family and friends of Byron Rosenbaum:

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

According the records of the Church, on July 1, 1922, Byron Wayne Rosenbaum was given a new family Name. With the water and Word of Holy Baptism, he was called a son of the eternal Father, named in Christ Jesus, through the work of the Holy Spirit. About 14 and a half years later, in the Church's rite of Confirmation, he was asked a question that sounded like this: *Do you intend to continue steadfast in this confession and Church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it?* He would have responded in this manner: *"I do, by the grace of God."*

Long before May 22 this year, in 1937, a young sinner-saint made such a promise. He would have done so for he had received the gift of the Faith in Holy Baptism. Throughout his youth, God worked to hold him fast to Himself in that Faith. At one point post confirmation, Byron was planning upon attending seminary, to take the path to become a pastor (that which, some in the military in days gone by, called a "Sky Pilot.") Yet, as he told me a couple of years ago, when he learned that he would have to learn Greek and Hebrew, well, he figured he had better find another calling! He would become another kind of pilot, a Naval Aviator. That vocation, as those who knew Barney can tell you, he did to the best of his ability. God blessed him with a fruitful and good career, and with a loving family.

¹ 1 John 3:1.

The Faith that had been sown in Byron sustained him throughout life into eternal life. In his last years, down into and through his last days, that man, by the grace of God, was held fast in the good promise he had made in 1937. His confession declared to the world that God had sealed him for blessed everlasting life in the Sacrament of Baptism.

That means that we are free to declare that our sainted brother has departed this mortal life in the Faith. He now dwells eternally with the Lord Jesus Christ and all those who have fallen asleep in Him. Today we have reminders that, for Saint Byron, these words about Jesus and the Father's children are true:

We know that whenever [Jesus] may appear, ones like Him we shall be, because we shall see Him just as He is.²

Our brother, who is also known to some of us as Barney, is even now awaiting the Lord's appearance in His glorified Body. That reality may be declared of Commander Rosenbaum not because of his wartime and peacetime exploits, nor his faithful love for either Lois, nor for his heading a fine family. That Barney will one day be raised from the dead, through the glory of the Father, in Christ Jesus, is a truth that was sealed when Jesus Himself rose from the dead as eternal Victor over death, sin, and the devil.

Byron's resurrection from those ashes which are near the baptismal font this day, on the Last Day, at the sound of the Trumpet, was assured on his baptismal day as he died with Christ and rose to new life in Him. That is why they are covered with the white pall which is used, in the Church, for those who fall asleep in the Faith. It is the sure and certain hope of the everlasting truth that declares the resurrection of the saints in glorified bodies that sustained him from life to life. In Christ, Barney was ready for the reality that awaits him, as today's verse declares:

Alleluia! Alleluia! Jesus Christ is the firstborn of the dead!

² 1 John 3:2b

Barney is with the Lord. God, through his life in the Faith, had prepared him with all he needed to take his final lift-off. Aviators, military fliers, share a special bond. We have a unique language. Those of us who sole-piloted single engine Warcraft know what it means to apply our training, our wits, and our faith every time, for every minute, in our assigned aircraft. For us, flight is man, machine, God-created physics, coupled with the skills, wisdom and knowledge that keeps us alert.

Just so it is with the Faith. For us that is empowered in man, through the gifts of God in His Church, which, when coupled with hearing and studying God's Word, imparts godly skills, wisdom and knowledge that keeps us alert to our final day. As we live in that, God fulfills this text in us:

Everyone continually having this hope in Him, continues to purify himself, just as He, that One, remains pure.³

In the Church, we have those gifts, those diving checklists. In military aviation we also find checklists. Aviators use those to ensure we miss nothing necessary in the completion of our assigned missions. We use call out and response in flying also.

In that manner, on Monday, May 15, 2017, this old Army aviator asked an older older Naval aviator, "Barney: Flaps up? Gear up? "Ready for the final ascent?" That wizened survivor of two major armed conflicts brightened up. With a twinkle of joy in his eyes, he gave a resounding, "Yes!"

Pilot-to-pilot the call had gone out. The final flight had been planned. In God's sight he was ready for he had God's checklist – the chief item which declared that Jesus had done all that was necessary for Barney's final flight into the heavens.

In Byron's life, that was mapped out from his birth in the Faith to his dying in the Faith. He had followed God's checklist unto the end, putting his trust in Holy Absolution, in the Lord's touch in the Sacrament of the Altar, in God's revealed promises. He evidenced the Faith as he recited the timeless words of Jesus through the

³ 1 John 3:3

prayer He gave. Barney confessed the Faith in the centuries-old Apostles' Creed, down to his last days and hours. As his strength waned, he was given God's gift of power to sing of His wonders in the hymns of the Church.

Barney was ready for his final ascent. He was thankful that God had given him more years of life than many people behold. He counted his blessings in Lois and the family she bore for him, and in the Lois who was his companion of his later years. He treasured his friends. He loved the Lord and mustered the strength to be in this house up until a relatively few days when he could no longer leave his home.

Byron knew that, throughout his life, God had kept him close, through simple means – God's Word and His Sacraments. Barney knew where he was headed, and he had been fully prepared by God to go. He wants his family and friends to not mourn as those who have no hope, but to behold that which he knew in part, and now knows fully. He desires that you behold his death in Jesus with the gift of clear sight on a cloudless day, that you would take comfort in God's Word such as this:

*Behold, El is my Yeshua; I will trust and not be afraid;
For my Strength and my Song is God, (the) God,
And He has become for me, Salvation!⁴*

In our time, the words from Scripture which you are hearing today were among the last passages heard by Saint Byron as he passed from life to life in the Lord. The hymns you sing this day were sung by him, from memory, with his pastors, throughout the days of his preparing to leave this veil of tears. We understand that he was brought up in an era of the Church wherein the faithful were well instructed in the treasures of the Faith. Those were held fast in his memory through repetition.

God has kept Byron in the good confession of the Faith. God's faithfulness moved that now fully-sainted child of God to truly trust and not fear his final takeoff and ascent. The Spirit moved through the words of the old hymns. They were part of

⁴ Isaiah 12:2.

the means God used to sustain our brother to his mortal end. The Son touched that child of the heavenly Father, held him to His faithfulness, even as Jesus came to him with His Body and Blood that forgave his sins and strengthened him for that which is now his in Christ. Jesus was, and is, His strength, song, and salvation.

That may not be as clear for you today as it was for Barney as he prepared for his last journey. Take heart, the Helper is here. He is working through the Word of God, through the hymns, prayers and confession of the ancient Creed.

God desires that you would have that which our brother now has – the sure and certain knowledge that the believer has no need to solo-pilot through this life. You are being given that which a future Navy Commander would learn as a young pilot. That is, no military pilot every truly flies alone. There are ground crews, controllers and all sorts of support personnel that keep just one aircraft and pilot aloft.

Some of you may have heard this example, most, perhaps not. When military pilots get together, we are known to swap flying stories. A person can tell when our eyes take on a certain glow, our hands raise up, and flight is imaged. Unless you were or are a pilot, you can only understand our tales in part. They can be explained: if we want to take the time to bring you along! It is from one of those times, when a couple of aviators were swapping stories of flying combat aircraft, to which this illustration traces its source.

Single engine, sole-piloted, combat aviators have particular skills, attitudes, attributes and personas. We need controls in each hand and on each foot. We work multiple radios, scan all our instruments, track our own flight route and engage all our weaponry, just to name a few tasks we continually perform in flight. On account of all that we do, we are often seen as stubborn. OK – we are!

There is no one in the aircraft but the single pilot – and the Faith that sustains him when the hours of sheer boredom that comprise a lot of flying turn to seconds of sheer terror. After a while, as a young single pilot matures, he learns that it is very

taxing to keep doing everything, all the time, for himself, his wingman, his aircraft and so forth. That is when he begins to gain wisdom.

So it is with the Faith. Many Christians, particularly those of certain generations, think they are sole-pilots of their faith. They call themselves spiritual and attempt to find God in all the emotionally pleasing, bodily satisfying things they experience. They are stubborn in saying they believe in God. Yet truly they are relying on themselves for all they need for spiritual life.

As people mature in the Faith, they are granted wisdom. They begin to learn that the Faith is never “me and Jesus,” or “me and my experiences.” They discover the wonder and joy of participating in the treasures and gifts of the Faith with others who are in the fight against the temptations of the devil, the world and their own flesh. They begin to understand the Scriptures most frequent use of “all of you,” and “we” in passages such as you hear today, for example,

O beloved ones, now children of God we are, and not yet may it have appeared what we shall be.⁵

Consider that, as it may be illustrated by that which our brother Barney learned long ago as he was flying home on leave. As professional courtesy, when aviators of multi-engine, multi-seat aircraft learn of a fellow aviator on board, it is not uncommon for them to invite him into the cockpit. There the guest sits in a jump-seat where they all can talk. The pilot and co-pilot enjoy telling a solo-pilot about their aircraft. That is just what those pilots did for our dear friend.

He told of sitting in the jump seat at takeoff. He heard the familiar commands echoed, “Gear up!” “Flaps up!” Then, he heard that which a sole-pilot of a single-engine fighter would ever seriously command, “Coffee!”

⁵ 1 John 3:2a.

That is when he gained wisdom that comes with years. When one flies with others, duties can be shared. There is even time for coffee, for the work-load is reduced, and there is someone along to serve such good things.

When one is in the Church, flying solo, all the attacks, all the human work, all one's attention is on keeping oneself aloft unto mission completion. When one learns that God created and sustains His Church so that all who are in the heaven-ship share the work, one has time for finding joy in the little things we share together.

This Byron Rosenbaum learned throughout nine decades of life in the Church. He was able to contribute his gifts, and to receive from others their gifts. He even had time to receive good things from God's Table-waiters – those gifts which prepared, strengthened and sustained Him to the eternal life which he now more fully enjoys. "Flaps up!" "Gear up!" Barney has made his final ascent... and the Church, those who are in this heaven-bound ship, will see him again, with all the saints, when Jesus appears in the Body, and we shall be like Him.

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Trinity, Saturday

Funeral Service for Byron W Rosenbaum

Isaiah 12:1-6; I John 3:1-3; John 16:5-15

June 17, 2017

Pastor Michael A. Morehouse

Solī Deo Gloria