

Remembering Jim McEntee

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Last Monday, one of our Church's best took his place with the circle of saints. Jim McEntee spent his life preaching the Gospel. Once in a while, he used words to do it. He advocated for the poor, he marched for peace, he helped warring factions reconcile, he sheltered the homeless, he welcomed orphans into his family, he fed anyone who was hungry.

At his funeral, two of his children spoke. The last several days they had heard stories about Jim, the voice for the poor. But to them, he was always just "dad." He sang to them silly songs, taught them how to drive, and barbecued in the backyard for family and friends. But he also taught them to care for the earth, for each other, and for those in need. One of them said that he and his brothers and sisters would join their dad on his various rallies. "Growing up, I didn't realize that most 7-year olds didn't go on marches with their father and Cesar Chavez every weekend."

The way Jim taught his children was the same way he preached the Gospel—not by words alone but by actions. And he did it not always with extravagant deeds but with a consistent and integrated lifestyle, one he learned by praying and living the Eucharist week after week. For his kids, he was a hero not for his extraordinary works of justice but for his everyday simple acts of love. For the forgotten of society, he was a companion not because he conquered unjust systems but because he was and asked us all to be good stewards of our resources. For our Church, he exemplified Gospel values because he encountered Christ not simply in church but in every person he met.

As liturgists, we can learn much from Jim McEntee. The main thing we can learn is that no matter how good our catechesis is, no matter how many bulletin inserts we make, no matter how much we try to explain the meaning of symbols, our actions in the liturgy (and outside of it) week after week will teach louder and deeper than any of our words. One extraordinary liturgy might leave an impression, but good, solid, genuine, simple liturgy week in and week out will change lives. We may work many hours to craft just the right prayers and homilies, to clothe the church with beautiful environment, or to get our harmonies perfect. But often it's the things that we don't pay attention to that will catechize over the long run. The liturgy will always teach. Our job is to make sure that what it communicates is what we intend it to teach.

Let us remember Jim McEntee and all who have taught us our faith, and let us be attentive to all the different ways we teach and communicate that faith.