



Celebrating the Life of the Honorable Thomas J. Fee
St. James Catholic Church
September 5, 2011
Remarks of Tom Foley

Mindy, Ryan and Abby, Danielle, Nick and Izzy, the two Toms (Fee and Gates) and Jean, Tom's sisters LuAnn, Kathleen, Patty Ann, Terry Lynn and brother Jim, and Mindy's brothers Greg and Dave and sister Deb, all your spouses and all Tom's loved ones who are assembled here today:

My wife Michele and I come from a tradition that always looks for the positive message, for the way forward, not back. It's a way of survival really, and the Irish, with their tragic history, have perfected it. The ancient Irish believed that those whom the gods love most die young. They also believed that grief in those moments most forlorn—what you have experienced these last few days Mindy—is the truest measure of real love. Finally, Danielle, Ryan and Abby, your dad's ancient ancestors believed that when one leaves this world, it's only their body that disappears. Our ancestors, going back thousands of years believed, and in Ireland today still believe, that it's only their body that dies—their spirit lives on.

The very idea—that your Dad's spirit lives on—is hard to understand. How will we be able to tell in the years to come—that it is Tom that we still feel around us, still guiding us somehow? How will you know it is your Tommy, Mindy, or your Dad, Danielle, Ryan and Abby, or your brother, your Uncle? How will we know that it is the spirit of our pal Tommy Fee that Kelly and JD and Bobby and Russ and John and Bill and a hundred other close friends will come to sense around us? Heck, I don't know for sure. Who do you think I am—Father Manei?? I am just up here because I loved the guy, like most of you. And I am looking for a way to keep him close in the years ahead.

Teddy Roosevelt famously said that you never know a man til you camp with him. Well, I only camped with the Fees once—in Pymatuming, PA—but I spent the equivalent of 12 whole months on the road with Tommy, spread out over two campaigns, three years and four cars. We traveled on hundreds of PA highways, we ate close to a thousand meals together on those trips (most of them at the “dashboard café”), and we called home to our wives and kids together several times a day, passing the phone back and forth in the front seat. You get to know a man pretty well in those circumstances.

And here are the four signals that will tell me it is Tommy's spirit that I sense around me—his commitment to his faith, to his family, to his community, and to his friends. If the spirit “nudges” that I get have anything to do with those four things, I'll know it's Tommy Fee knocking on my door. Just a few words about each.

First, his faith. Tom Fee was a man of great faith. I mean that in the conventional sense, of course. He went to his church, he knew his priest, he had an uncomplicated, reverent relationship with his God. He built that relationship, wherever he lived, the old fashioned way—if his church had a carnival, he worked the carnival; if they had a clam bake/communion breakfast/sausage fry/Friday fish dinners, he worked them too. That's just who Tom was and how he did things—all hands on deck, his first.

But I mean that he was a man of faith in another deeper way as well. He knew—even after the long suffering of his first wife Marilyn—that God had a plan for him and Danielle. And that plan's name was Mindy and that plan's name was Ryan and that plan's name was Abby. And God's plan brought him to the Gates clan, to Lancaster County, to Manheim. To a new family, a better football team, the Mayor's office, the Judge's robes, the most Christmas lights in town. And look at Danielle now, with a good guy like Nick for a husband and a beautiful baby named Isabella. So if you feel Tom's spirit around you and it's got anything to do with faith and family, then it really might be him.

Just one more thought about Tom Fee and family. Even as Tom built a new family 150 miles away from the home base of his parents Tom and Lucretia, he never left anyone behind. Just ask his brothers and sisters who was the glue in that big family—sometimes the glue that sticks *too much*, some of them might tell you. Tommy Fee was a great man for working the phones—whether in politics or for family—and he worked that phone back to New Castle, out to Slippery Rock and over to Hermitage and Pittsburgh. He never stopped being the big brother, not through tragedy or triumph. He was always the same guy at the other end of the phone, and he would want us to be that way at the other end of his life as well.

Third word that played a big part in Tom's life—community. You know I don't think it will surprise any of the people here today from any other place that Tom Fee ever lived—New Castle, Youngstown, Harrisburg—it won't surprise any of them when I tell you that everybody in Manheim knew Tom Fee. When he first got elected Mayor, I used to kid him that he only won because Mindy decided not to run! But you know over time, Tom won all those votes by the power of his own personality, by the way he made you feel that you were the most important person in the room, by the sheer force of all the different ways that he demonstrated his commitment to his own community. It's no accident that Tom's family asked for any donations in his name to be given to the police and fire companies here. He worked the fundraisers—the Touchdown Club, the Lions events, football, band, dance team—you name it, he worked it. Tom knew the men and women from all those community groups long before he became Mayor. He always understood that they are the backbone of the community to which Mindy brought him home.

You know a lot of folks don't have any reason to know that Tom spent 25 years of his life working with just about every big mahof in Harrisburg—one of the first calls I had to make last Thursday was to the last Governor he worked for, who was as shocked as the rest of us. But the titles never mattered to Tom—it was the individual person and his community that he cared about. He didn't invite the big shots to his legendary Seven Fishes Feast on Christmas Eve—he invited his friends from the community because that is who was important to Tom and Mindy. So if you feel a spiritual nudge telling you to get over and help the Coaches at the team barbecue, or the Lions Club at its Saturday morning street cleanup program, you'll know that it's Tom. If it was good for the community, it was good enough for Tom to give his time and his talents.

There is one last word that makes us think of Tom Fee, and that word is friend. You know it takes a **long** time to make an **old** friend. Tom Fee had a way of short circuiting that—I don't know if it was the piercing blue eyes, the quick laugh, the way he had with a story—but he made friends faster than butter melts in a microwave.

I think a lot of us in this church today could give a talk on what kind of friend he was—Tommy was the guy who met Presidents, but still made you feel you were the most important person in the world when he saw you. Tommy was the guy who wore the Judges robes by day, and volunteered to cook the sausage at the football game that night. Tommy Fee was the guy if you needed a shirt, he'd give you the one off his own back, as he famously did one time in his courtroom to a poor soul down on his luck with the law.

He was just that kind of guy. Tom Fee understood that to *have a friend* you have to *be a friend*, and that's why he had so many. It says in the Bible that "A faithful friend is a strong defence: and he that hath found such a one hath found a treasure." I think we all know in this church that we just lost a treasure, as the Bible says, a faithful friend and a strong defence. And I think that part of what makes this all so especially hard for Mindy is she hasn't just lost her husband, she feels like she lost her best friend. Tom and Mindy was one word in our house—it's just who they were together.

Of course at this point, he would tell us—his friends—to get on with it. Take care of Mindy and the kids but get out there and live it—get to the football games, go to the movies with your honey, shag fly balls with your son, go sit in the audience at your little girl's dance concert. Smile at your loved ones, or just at the very thought of them.

I started off talking about spirits and the Irish part of Tom's ancestry and I want to finish there. If the spirit moves you sometime, and the movement has anything to do with faith and family, community and friendship, then you can be sure it has something to do with the Honorable Thomas J. Fee. William Butler Yeats, perhaps Ireland's most famous believer in the spirit life said it best: "Count where man's glory begins and ends and say my glory was I had such friends."

Thank you for the friendship, Thomas. We love you man.