

To all those whom I was blessed to serve,
for I received much more than I gave.

About the Author

Father Michael J. Kennedy was born on March 20, 1941, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He grew up in a poor, neighborhood to a family sometimes on welfare. Although an athlete and good student, Michael had a propensity for hanging with the rough crowd.

Gender and racial equality were taught at home and political discussions and campaign involvement were common. Hubert H. Humphrey, Walter Mondale, and Eugene McCarthy were among those who visited his childhood home.

Michael attended Catholic grade school and DeLaSalle High School in Minneapolis, then St. John's University in Collegeville, Minnesota. He left during his senior year for the St. Paul Seminary. In 1967 he was ordained a priest and became the associate pastor at the Church of St. Olaf until 1971. During that time he volunteered at the Stillwater Prison to people without family, was a board member for the Urban Coalition of Minneapolis, and chaplain for both the Daughters of Isabella in Minneapolis, and the Hennepin County Court and Jail.

He was an associate pastor at the Church of St. Austin from 1971 to 1975, during which time he was also chaplain for the Knights of Columbus, North Minneapolis Council. From 1975 to 1979 he was Director of the Priests' Personnel Board of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis. In 1978 he became pastor of St. Mary of the Lake in White Bear Lake, Minnesota, where he served for twelve years. Michael became Dean of Deanery One and chair of the Presbyteral Council for the Archdiocese and a board member of St. Thomas Academy in Mendota while guiding St. Mary's through a renovation project.

On a six-month sabbatical, Michael studied storytelling at the National Storytelling Center in Tennessee and went to Berkeley, California, where he met with a performer and director of the Berkeley Repertory Theater.

In 1990, Michael was appointed to his next parish, the Church of St. Patrick of Cedar Creek in Oak Grove, Minnesota, where he

served for fourteen years. During his pastorate, he also helped guide this parish through a building project. He retired June 15, 2004, after quintuple bypass surgery, a series of strokes and other medical issues.



Back row, left to right: Eileen and Bill
Front row, left to right: Michael and Mary

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Foreword

Those who have known Father Michael Kennedy throughout his almost forty years of a very active priesthood have known him as a priest of and for the people. During his priesthood, he has been involved in two very major building projects. Father Michael has had a special commitment to youth, the imprisoned and to others who have not had someone to stand up for, as well as to speak for, them. His sensitivity to the defenseless is powerfully expressed in his musing about the little child in the elevator who had not stopped crying on the inside.

Some, who will read this collection of musings, will be those who started reading them when Father Michael was serving in a downtown parish in Minneapolis. These readers will have followed him as he visited the jails, hospitals and effectively shared the priesthood of Christ with those of means as well as the poor and disinherited. They have followed his ministry through parishes, building projects and during the time that he served his brother priests as their personnel director.

Others may have only become acquainted with his musings at some point between his days in the city and his current "country home." At the time of this reading, readers will be aware that, after decades of helping others deal with their shortcomings, tragedies and disabilities, he has had to deal with his own limitations. Cardiac bypass surgery and strokes briefly discouraged him and limited his writing. However, it was not long before he resumed writing his musings and commentaries on the Sunday Gospel. During his convalescence, he made a special plea for the prayers of children and prisoners. He believes that the Father lends a special ear to children and prisoners, for his Son was one. Those who have heard Father Michael preach have benefited from his wit, which is seasoned with his Irish heritage. Hoping that it does not sound unduly sacrilegious, his storytelling ability is such that, if you close your eyes, you might think that you are sitting in an Irish pub or living room. Of course, some of this ability was honed during the many Sunday afternoons

that he and his brother gathered in the living room of his parent's home to play cribbage.

Thankfully, Father Michael has sorted through some of his most helpful musings and compiled them in this most heartwarming book. He is a man whose love for all shows itself in his ministry and in many other ways in his life. And this love is exhibited in these musings.

JACK QUESNELL
Friend of Father Michael

Preface

This book is the result of a lifetime of writing and reflecting on life and on how the Scriptures apply to our lives today. It has been said that while most people look straight ahead at life's challenges, I tend to tilt my head and look at life from "outside the box." The result can be a new insight, or it might just be tilted and strange. Whatever the result, these musings cover almost forty years of being placed in parish bulletins "outside the box."

The following musings appeared in various parish bulletins, and for about the last four or five years have gone out weekly by email and have also been posted on the website of the Southern Dominican Province. As has been true of my parents and siblings, no one is neutral about the author, his writings or his sense of humor. I first discovered this at about the age of five.

A special thanks to those who served on the committee that babysat this book: Jen Schulenberg, Donna Kraft, Deb Landwehr and Lynda Keenan. Thankee!

How to Use This Book

As you'll note from the Contents page, this book covers Year B of the Catholic liturgical calendar in appropriate order, beginning with the First Sunday of Advent. This allows you, if interested, to prepare for the upcoming Sunday by reading the corresponding musing, or by reflecting on the lesson after you've been to Mass and heard the homily. You can also use it with a weekly study group, if you like, for the same purposes. This will help you discover the church readings throughout the year in a logical order.

To make the journey more interesting, each of the Sunday/Holy Day musings is followed by a more topical musing or reflection that spans many years and many issues, both public and personal. These may or may not have anything to do with the musing for each Sunday, but is provided to nudge, challenge, and help you reflect on your faith as you live it out day by day in the real world.

*I wasn't there but others
were and they told others
who told others,
who told still others, and down
down the centuries and
finally someone told me.
Today I tell you.
You may want to tell others...*

The Now Eternal
(1st Sunday of Advent)

In Latin it was called
Adventus
The anticipation
The coming
Of the Bethlehem event
And of the End of time
And the hearers were warned
Be ready
And on guard

But we are veterans now
Of many advents
And comings and goings
So one more
New liturgical year
Is just one more
Unless
A key can be found
To unlock routine
And ritual so familiar
We anticipate
Not much any more

Maybe
A key is simple
Just living
In the present
Not our past
Nor our mysterious future
Just living in the
Now
For now is
And
Now is

When
He
Comes
To
Us

Brigid

Why did you arrive
With such beautiful eyes
And that smile
Stolen from the sun

Within minutes
I'm sure
No more than a few
You grabbed my soul
In your open arms
And hesitating trust

You were seven
Or almost
You said
With dark and almost clean hair
The history of hurts
Never quite left you
As you said hello
To another non-dad

With all of our chatter
Which both of us know
Didn't matter
It wasn't 'til you
Gave me your hand
And held on
That I knew

Someday I hope you too
Know and understand
That once we
Crossed that line
As you huddled against me
So the world would be

More safe
Once I know
I had to say good-bye
To you
And no farewell
Has ever cut
So deep

St. John the Blister
(2nd Sunday of Advent)

Even after all these years
And all the readings
Classes and seminars
Still after all that
John seems
A tad strange
Or at least
A bit different

We know
He was fond
Of Elijah
And at least in
Word pictures
He also drew
From perhaps
Personal mournful
Desert experiences

Still he comes across
Like a relative
Who stays too long
Or a friend
Seemingly always
Grieving something
While his many laments
Drive joy from
The neighborhood

But it turns out that
While he first shows up
As a sore on the
Human heart
His insistence

On repentance
Reveals that he knows
Forgiveness
Will always be given
And stunningly
The blister
Evolves into a
Beauty
Mark

He Stopped

In the elevator
The little brown-haired boy
Began to cry
And then to scream

His mother hit him hard
So very hard
For such a little boy
But he did stop
Screaming
On
The
Outside