

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius  
A sermon preached by Father Bradford at Solemn Requiem Mass  
Frederick Fellows Jillson  
June 14, 2019

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It is a great honor and privilege for Father Patrick Armano, Deacon John Koza, and me to offer this *Requiem* Mass for the repose of the soul of our friend **Frederick Fellows Jillson**. I know our esteem for **Fred** and for **Sheila** is shared by the members of the Carmelite Order whose pastoral solicitude of **Fred** especially in his last days on earth, was deeply appreciated, and allowed a dying man to end his days content and at peace. We are also grateful to Father James Achadina for his kind permission to offer this Mass in his parish church today, and to some of his parishioners who also have made us feel very welcome in this beautiful church.

**Fred Jillson** and I were both priests in the Episcopal Church before becoming Catholics, and when we were together we could “talk shop.” Those visits were regrettably fewer than either of us wanted, and **Fred** said I could solve the problem by moving to the North Shore! But we had this common background. Both of us many times had offered the Anglican Burial Office for departed parishioners. That service began with the clergyman, often at the back of the nave and leading the casket, saying the majestic words of Our Lord Jesus Christ “I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me, shall never die.” Those words were a comfort and solace to a great number of souls in a time of a sense of loss and great anxiety. And they sure beat “On Eagle’s Wings” and “Be Not Afraid!”

The 16<sup>th</sup> century Anglican reformers had rejected the doctrine of Purgatory and eliminated the Requiem Mass. By the time the American Episcopal Church came along, the early 19<sup>th</sup> century ecclesiastical worthies were very pleased with their Anglican Burial Office. Bishop William White of Philadelphia is on record with his satisfaction: “The improvement made by the American Church in this department, has, it is trusted, left no plausible ground of objection against the service. In particular, it is so divested of all reference to the state of the deceased person, that no scandal of his life need occasion scruple in the Minister, or disgust in the attendance on the solemnity.” So there!

The Lord’s assurance “I am the resurrection and the life” are familiar to anyone who attends Christian funerals. But it is important to remember they were said

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once *for the first time*. When Lazarus had died, Our Blessed Lord came to Bethany not so much to console Martha and Mary as to gently draw them into a closer faith in Him as Lord. Everything Jesus told us should lead us to believe death is a thing of less consequence when compared with the deeper and more wonderful realities of the greater life of which death is the entrance. This greater life begins when we have faith in Jesus Christ.

The Lord said to Martha, “Your brother will rise again.” And Martha agreed. Lazarus would rise at the resurrection at the last day. That was a safe answer, a Sunday school answer, a *catechism* answer, and it was true enough. But then Jesus made it *personal*. “I am the Resurrection and the Life.” These words must have sounded startling. Jesus was a revered family friend to Lazarus and his sisters. But here He was describing Himself as a *future event*! It seemed an odd thing to say to a person mourning the loss of her brother. But Almighty God *owns* the future and presides over it in a way we can hardly begin to understand. Fellowship with Christ, which is begun when we are baptized, is participation in the Divine Life of God Himself. His is the life that never ends. So how did Martha of Bethany respond? “Yes, Lord, I have come to believe that You are the Messiah, the One Who is to Come.” She didn’t fully understand what Jesus was saying, but *she trusted the One Who said it*. The Blessed Lord revealed to the surviving sisters at Bethany, and to you and me, that to mourn rightly it was crucial to have a right and firm faith in God’s Own Son.

Those Anglican reformers were schismatics, but they also had genius for liturgy. For the opening anthem of their Burial Office they had borrowed words of our Lord used in the Sarum Rite of the English Catholic Church. Those words sum up Catholic teaching about our resurrection and eternal life as grounded upon faith in our Blessed Lord. **Fred Jillson** used those words many times in commending souls to the Lord’s eternal safe keeping. Now the same words are being said as we commend his soul to Our Lord.

**Fred Jillson** was *all in*. In his last years **Fred** spoke honestly of failures, redemption, and blessings. (You who are here today are among those blessings.)

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About the failures **Fred** said “I don’t remember ever committing a sin I didn’t like doing.” How refreshing that is to a priest-confessor used to hearing prevarications and mitigating circumstances! And then when **Fred Jillson** broke down and God broke in, again **Fred Jillson** was *all in*; all in on *redemption* and *forgiveness*.

In 2011 when Prince Otto von Habsburg died, the eulogies and obituaries lasted two weeks. And when the prince’s funeral-entourage arrived at the imperial Habsburg family crypt at the Capuchin church, the master of ceremonies knocked at the ancient doors. “Who desires entry?” asked the voice of the door warden. “Otto of Austria” answered the master of ceremonies, “former crown prince of Austria-Hungary; prince royal of Hungary and Bohemia, of Dalmatia, Croatia, Slavonia...” The master proceeded down a list of forty-two illustrious titles. But the door warden was not moved: “We do not know him.”

The master of ceremonies knocked again. “Who desires entry?” “Dr. Otto von Habsburg, president and honorary president of the Pan-European Union, and *quondam* president of the European Parliament...” and the worldly honorifics continued, this time including an endless list of academic titles. Again, the door warden was not moved: “We do not know him.”

The master of ceremonies knocked a third time. “Who desires entry?” Then, for the last time, for the last Habsburg crown prince of imperial Austria-Hungary, the last answer was given: “Otto, a mortal and sinful man.” The ancient door swung open. “Then let him enter,” responded the door warden.

At the end of a *Requiem* Mass you hear an ancient prayer of the Church: “Rest in peace.” Before peace ever described a philosophical idea or the absence of war, peace is a *Person*. The angels at Bethlehem had it right. They announced the birth of the Prince of Peace. Jesus is the origin and destination of everything that has to do with peace. He holds all the stock in the company! So we pray in confidence for **Frederick Fellows Jillson**: “Rest in Jesus.” *Then let him enter.*