

Deacon George Collins Eulogy

On behalf of my sister, Barbara, our husbands, Bob and Waldemar, and the five grandchildren, Bill, Chris, Matt, David and Kate, thank you all for being here with us today to celebrate the mass and to celebrate the life of Deacon George Collins.

George was the oldest of 3 boys. When he was young, George believed his mother spoke to God. One day she sent him to church with 10 cents for the offertory. He decided instead to put 5 cents in the basket and use the other 5 cents for gum. He came into the house after church chewing his gum. His mother said, 'You didn't put all the money into the basket like I asked you to, did you?' He answered, chewing his gum, 'How did you know?' She said, 'God told me.'

He met Laretta Balassi in 1945, and they were married during the famous 'Blizzard of 47' in North Tarrytown, NY. George and Laretta were married for 63 years. George was a true Irishman, a teaser, but Laretta always seemed to know when he was teasing. One year at Christmas some nieces asked him, 'Uncle George, what did you get Aunt Lola for Christmas this year?' He answered with a straight face, "A nice new set of shiny trash cans." They were horrified, and he kept the joke going for years. I asked our mother how she knew he was teasing. She said she knew because when he was, the corner of his mouth curled up just a little bit.

When their father passed away, George's brothers, Bernie and Bob, came to him and said, "George, you are the head of the family now. You are the Head. And we, we are just the younger brothers, we are nothing. So George, we want you to know you are now the head of nothing."

George was ordained a Permanent Deacon by Terrance Cardinal Cooke at St. Patrick's Cathedral in NYC in May of 1978. He served at Sacred Heart Parish in Suffern, NY for 8 years, where among other things, he taught 8th grade Religious Education, and wrote a book on teaching Religious Ed to middle schoolers. George and Laretta retired to Boynton Beach in 1986 and became members of this wonderful parish, St. Thomas More. He served as Permanent Deacon here for 25 years, where he led the RCIA program, bringing hundreds of people into the church. He also formalized the baptismal and marriage preparation programs, baptizing over 2,000 babies, and performing hundreds of marriages and wake services.

George and Laretta loved this community. When my pastor came for dinner to meet Dad, I noticed Dad started a sentence several times with, “Well, at *my* parish...” How wonderful it was that you all gave him such a loving going-away celebration. Most people, if they’re lucky, only get that after they die. He still had all of your cards, and as I read through them, it is clear that he knew how much he was loved. You truly were their family, and they cared about the people of this parish very, very much.

George had two great loves in his life: He was in love with Jesus Christ, and he was in love with Laretta. Everything he did and said revolved around either one or the other. He understood the commitment and response that real love demands. He stressed the importance of growing in one’s faith; to never stay stagnant. George treasured the greatness of ordinary life, and he appreciated and communicated God’s love for us in our every day ordinary experiences.

The day after the going-away party, I was with Dad, packing him up for the trip to Maryland. He said, “I can’t get this song out of my head.” I asked him which song. He said, “‘Soon and very soon, we are going to see the king.’ Maybe God is trying to tell me something.” The song stayed with him this last month. He was humming it the night before he died. Dad said he wanted it played as his funeral mass recessional hymn, and sung by you, the community he and Mom loved. So please sing it with us. It will make him very happy.

Marianne Collins Harmon