

Jack Koch's Funeral Homily

To Nancy, Nicole, Jack and Bob, Joe, Jessica and Melanie, Mickey and Mary, grand kids, nieces, & nephews, we offer our deepest sympathies. To his many friends and fellow parishioners we offer our condolences as well. Jack has left a huge hole in each of our hearts, in his family, on his street, in our parish. Jack was one in a million. No one disputes that, especially his family.

George Kellend once said, "My father didn't tell me how to live;

he lived and let me watch him do it". Jack was that kind of father and grandfather. He was a devoted husband as well. He relished opportunities to be with his children and babysit his grandchildren.

Jack's laugh was infectious. It was loud. Liz Greller would love to work Tuesdays just to hear us laugh at staff dinners. But it was Jack who told the best stories, and Jack who made us laugh. It was Jack whose voice she heard the clearest and Jack whose face turned purple with delight he'd laugh so hard and so loud.

Over the years, I visited Jack in hospital many times I forgotten how many. And OMG we'd laugh so hard. I remember one occasion there was this guy, Frank in the next bed watching TV. And Jack is making jokes and dropping one liners I am laughing and then he is laughing and we were just getting too loud. Then Frank shuts off the TV. So we said "Sorry for making noise and laughing" and Frank says, 'Are you kidding', you guys are more entertaining than the TV, I'd rather listen to you".

Jack was a fantastic athlete. He liked sports and he was good at them, especially golf and baseball. He watched sports and was very knowledgeable about them. He rejoiced when the Cavs won a championship for Cleveland, the only one in his lifetime.

I called Jack my Little Buddy – not many could say that to Jack. He weighed more but I was a little taller.

Psychologists say that 11 minutes after eating is the opportune time to ask a man a question, which means you could ask Jack a question any time of day or night and it would be the opportune time.

Jack loved chicken in all its forms. I would keep baked chicken thighs and soft boiled eggs in the fridge. And Jack would stop in and say, "I solved the eternal riddle of which came first, the chicken or the egg. I had one of each".



Jack and Nancy once sent me a picture of them eating a piece of the world's best cheesecake. This was a double taunt because not only was it the cheesecake, Jack and Nancy were having lunch with my old boss in Vegas. How is it that Jack is having lunch with *my* old boss without me? She too fell under the spell of Jack Koch. Everybody's a friend of Jack. He knew how to woo.

Jack had a unique way of communicating his opinion. I had taught him how to play pai gow poker and one time, when we were at the Hollywood casino in Toledo I remarked, Hey Jack, How come you are up \$200 and I', the professional dealer and I'm losing. Jack said, "You don't hold the cards right."

In one of our last conversations he asked me what was new and I told him I bought this book titled *The Dangerous Case of Donald Trump, 27 Psychiatrists and mental health experts assess a President.* and he said, why didn't they just call me, They could have saved themselves a lot of time.

Jack loved our Catholic ritual, not the legalistic and lifeless Mass of EWTN, but the vibrant, engaging liturgy like we have here at Blessed Trinity and of which Jack was such an essential part. Jack knew that a meaningful, energizing and spirit-filled liturgy had the power to transform the hardest of hearts.

He loved the Eucharistic Prayer that included the lines, "And when, as once for his disciples, so now for us, Christ opens the Scriptures and breaks the bread." Jack knew it was Jesus who was running the show. He emphasized the breaking, the sharing of life as the real Eucharist, the way the early church recognized Jesus in the breaking of the bread. This grace transformed Jack weekly. His life was broken for others

Jack could write petitions so meaningful and beautiful which he did each week. You'd hear them and say to yourself, "Yes, that is what I want to pray for! Yes, those words are the words that speak for me". It was not uncommon for visitors to our parish to ask for a copy of the petitions after Mass.

His homilies named grace in everyday life.
Worshipping with him was a pleasure and a joy

One of Jack's favorite sayings was "you can't fix stupid" especially in government. His best airport stories were about "You can't fix stupid."

Jack loved life, loved to laugh, and loved the church, not so much the institutional one. Certainly not the one of Pope Benedict. More like the church of Pope Francis: any church where people living in community, or trying to, was the priority.

Jack called me every day. When he called he often asked, "How was Mass? How did you do? How was the participation? How are you? How's your mom? Sometimes he'd call and say, I just wanted to hear your voice". I know the attention Jack gave me was the same he gave his family and other friends. Jack cared about the church in general and our parish in particular.

He celebrated the life and strength of our community of faith. He shared in the daily struggle to make it work. He'd go crazy over some decrees from Rome that said you can't use gluten free hosts for communion. And he would say, "When did Jesus say that?" That was another of Jack's favorite lines. And then Jack would lament that Rome would talk about insignificant stuff rather than the generation of people that aren't even going to church. That's what really bothered him.

Jack believed in the church that we heard about a few weeks ago. "Go into the highways and byways and bring in everyone, the good and the bad, and make a banquet out of it". That is the essence of our faith. Make a community out of people who have disparate views and personal agenda. Get them to see the world from the other person's point of view and then God's point of view.

As a deacon Jack often felt disrespected. In the eyes of many, deacons were somewhere between glorified lay people and second class clerics. After ordination, after 43 years of enjoying white privilege, that experience of being a deacon, a minority and an enigma, opened his heart to so many Gospel stories. Jack could feel what it was like to be judged, ignored, systematically excluded or oppressed. Jack became an advocate for the poor, the marginalized, women in general and religious women in the church, members of the LGBTQ community, African Americans, the physically challenged and so on. It didn't matter to Jack if you were Matthew Kelly or Matthew Burke. All were invited to the banquet.

Let me say a few words about our readings. In Sirach we read about a family man. Jack was that family man, first and foremost. What his family may not know is that we lived wedding, every pregnancy and birth, every cancer treatment, every first communion vicariously through him. We can see Jack baptize his grandchildren, and bless the children at the children's liturgy of the word. He told us of stories of his grandchildren's successes or mishaps in school. To know Jack was to know his family and how much he loved them.

In Phillipians – we hear of a joyful spirit. Pope Francis eloquently wrote about the Joy of the Gospel. Bishop Perez has mentioned that theme as well. The words 'joy' and 'Jack' go hand in hand. Jack stories are joy stories. We all have our favorite stories about Jack, especially when he made us laugh and joyful and feel important like we were the only other person in the room with him. Jack often referenced the spirit and Jack was moved by the spirit. As a plumber Jack saw a lot of plugged up toilets in his lifetime. As a plumber at the airport he certainly saw his share of *it*. But I am pretty sure that Jack was that joyful little boy in the story that said "there's gotta be a pony in here somewhere." Jack was a man of prayer and a man of peace.

In the gospel we hear, "Come to me all you who labor and are burdened". We are labored and burdened. And we come to Christ who helps us carry our burden. It was Ella Wheeler who said, "Laugh and the world laughs with you, weep and you weep alone." She must not have been a person of faith. What we hear in the Gospel, the power of community, is that we do not cry alone, but that Christ and God's people gathered today, journey with us and share the burden and cry together.

What can be said to console you? To be honest, not much. Time helps. But grief is dealing with loss. It's like losing an arm or a leg. You don't get used to that. You learn that now as a paraplegic, you are a new person, and now you must maneuver through life not as the person you were, but as the person who carries that loss with you.

Gwen Flowers, the famous poet and grief counselor said it best:

I had my own notion of grief.
I thought it was the sad time that followed the death of someone you love.
And you had to push through it
To get to the other side.
But I'm learning there *is* no other side.
There is no pushing through.
But rather,
There is absorption.
Adjustment.
Acceptance.
And grief is not something you complete,
But rather, you endure.
Grief is not a task to finish
And move on,
But an element of yourself-
An alteration of your being.
A new way of seeing.
A new definition of self.

Some say, Jack how comforting it is knowing that Jack died doing what he loved: playing a round of golf in Myrtle Beach. And I get that. But the nerd in me wants to correct that and say, "what Jack really loved was being with his family and friends. This is the first thing that Jack taught us about God. God loves to be with us as much as Jack loved to be with family and friends.

The second thing we learn about God from Jack is that too often God says, "I miss you. I just wanted to hear your voice. Call me".

Jack drove the grandkids to school at St. Mark. It would have been easier just to shoot down Rocky River Drive, but Jack would go via the Metro parks. They could watch the river rise. They would see flowers. They would spot deer. It wasn't the fastest way but it was a better way. Lesson three: I will show you a still more excellent way. I am the way and the truth and the life.

Jack was generous and thoughtful in his generosity. He would "shoo" the beggar, Gibson out of church for panhandling but then he'd give Gibson money to go get something to eat....or maybe to drink. Jack didn't judge. He just gave of himself.

I hope our God is non-judgmental like Jack was.

There have been so many laughs and fond memories of Jack. But there is also the elephant in the room. Jack, why did you do this to us? Why did you leave us so soon? Why didn't you take care of yourself? And if Jack were here he'd say to us, "I didn't do this to you? Have you not heard of genetics? I got bad genes. I survived two heart attacks. I had a quadruple bypass and later stents put in. I was lucky to last this long, Longer than my dad, longer than my brother, Tom. I didn't do this *to* you. It was my time." And then we think about how we blame God for stuff and God says, "I didn't do that to you. If you can't figure out why things happen, don't make me the scapegoat". Look to Jack. He'll explain it for you.

Even in death Jack built community. Jack brought people together who on any other occasion, would not be caught dead in the same room. Like Jack's love, God's reconciling power is even greater than that.

I asked Jack the last night, "How's heaven?" And he said, "Just peachy!"

And then he added, "I spent time with my mom and dad and Tom today. The golf courses are fantastic, the food is good, the liturgies are moving and the Spirit is alive. You're gonna like it up here. I can't wait to see you again."