

*Bienvenidos y gracias por venir.* The Bible says, “Lord, you have searched me, and you know me... I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made.” Friends of Fr. Bruce, we learned from him that every single one of us was uniquely, fearfully and wonderfully made. But today we celebrate the life of Fr. Bruce Clanton, who was *especiallly* unique and wonderfully made.

I’m Joe Kaboski, one of Bruce’s kids, and a long-time friend. Bruce asked me if I would give his eulogy because he said I’d “keep it real”. I’ve had his phone all week, and on Facebook one of you said that Bruce “loved every single person unconditionally”. Folks, that’s not “keepin’ it real”. Bruce didn’t love everyone. I mean, if you’ve been on Facebook, you *know* he didn’t love Donald Trump. He didn’t love businessmen, or “Christians”, or even white people. He would never even admit that he *was* white. No, he was *Irish*, even though you can’t get any whiter than Irish. He was the only priest I know who wouldn’t admit he was Christian. No, he was in love with a Jew and his mother. “What would *Mary* do?”

The Bruce I know was not just unique but a fool and a walking contradiction, in many different ways. Bruce was both easy going and horribly stubborn. Coming of age in 1960s’ California, he loved peace and social justice, campaigned as Teens for Kennedy with his cousin, Diane. He adopted that laid back hippy look sandals, poncho, mop hair, bushy mustache. He *was* easy going when you met him, which is why everyone felt comfortable with him. But as you got to know Bruce better, you’d also realize that that he could be as opinionated and stubborn as anyone.

Two creatures are notoriously stubborn: a saint and an ass. The saint is so devoted to God’s way than nothing can bend them away. The ass is so stuck in their own way that no prodding will get them to move for the other. If I’m *keeping it real*, the truth is that Fr. Bruce could be both. I’ll get back to the saint part, but first I want to acknowledge that Bruce could be not only an ass but a *pain* in the ass. (Sorry about the language, but, keeping it real, that’s how Bruce would have said it. Even in Church!)

Anyone who ever disagreed with or had to collaborate as a peer with Bruce would know this. Anyone in a position of authority over Bruce would especially agree. I loved Bruce, but I imagine he was a challenge for his loving parents, Russ and Mimi, and his younger brothers, Steven and Mike. And I would never want to have

been his bishop, or provincial, or principal, or doctor, or bookkeeper, or mayor. Those were all difficult jobs. And I especially want to thank a lot of people who tried to help Bruce after his fall, when his health declined, and he lost his house, his car, and his freedom. We all owe people like Angel Ramos, Steve Murphy, Mike Frontier, and his fellow Salvatorians, Fr. Scott Wallenfels, Fr. Peter Schuessler, and Fr. Silas Henderson, a huge note of gratitude for helping protect Fr. Bruce from himself there at the end. For the record, no one stole Bruce's car or house or dog. I felt for Bruce at the end there. I wish we could have been there better for Bruce. His mind slipped, and his faults became exaggerated. His feelings of loneliness and abandonment were real, but blasting his loneliness and frustration over Facebook was not really him. He was at peace with death though, and had been for some time. His last wish was literally that we tell his story among the Salvatorians, and portray him as the fool he was. So, while he did get difficult, but it's also not the way we should remember him.

Instead, we should remember Fr. Bruce both as a fool and a good priest, but there is another contradiction. Bruce knew he wanted to become a priest, after reading a biography of St. Francis at age 8. He wanted to follow St. Francis, who gave everything he had to the poor and the leper, gave up everything he had to rely only on God, saw God in all things and all people, and saw not only Muslims but the animals, the sun, and the moon as his brother and sister. That tells you a lot about how Bruce thought. If you were puzzled by Fr. Bruce taking Bubu to church and feeding him people food, you should read about St. Francis preaching to the animals! Bruce's admiration for Francis gave him his own strength and courage. St. Francis had courage to care for lepers, Fr. Bruce had the courage to move onto the inner city. Francis begged for his daily bread, Bruce one-upped him by spending money *before* he had it! He'd rather have money burn a hole in his pocket than a hole in his soul. Bruce wanted to follow Francis and be a priest, and – here's another contradiction -- it was only later that he found that St. Francis was never a priest. Nevertheless, at age 18, a young Bruce Clanton boarded a bus from Sacramento to study seminary at St. Nazian's, Wisconsin.

He eventually became a Salvatorian priest, ordained on as perfect a day as you can imagine: April Fool's Day. He started and remained a Fool for Christ because the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom.

On that note, another contradiction: Fr. Bruce wasn't a *good* priest, and yet he was. Even when he tried, Bruce couldn't bring himself to follow the rules. At Youth Church, with Ann Frontier playing music, we'd act out the Gospels and he'd even bring kids up and have them read the Eucharistic Prayer that only an ordained priest should read! So, yes, he broke the rules, but he also brought so many of us closer to God. Turns out, lots of teens, lots of *people*, also have trouble following the rules (and even *laws*), and Bruce might have been the only man of God that many of us could connect to. We needed him, especially at that time and place in our lives. It was wonderful that the day before he died, there was a constant stream of visitors, "kids" of all ages by now, coming to thank him for all he'd done for them.

Bruce was also a teacher: JFK Prep, St Pius, St. Cat's, San Juan Diego, John XXIII, tutoring and reading programs. Like St. Francis, Bruce saw God in all things. He knew that the world was so much deeper than what we could see on the surface. He wanted to share that with young people, to broaden our visions, so he paid us to read, took us to meet authors, taught us to make movies, or just took us to go see movies. Bruce had a great appreciation for humor, beauty, art, music and literature, even the graphic novel variety. You could see that love for art all through his Casa Cesar Chavez.

Okay, back to the original contradiction: Everyone here knows that Bruce was an unusually kind and loving person, but the truth is again that Bruce *didn't* love everyone. Instead, Bruce loved the people that others didn't love. Parents: Bruce loved *teens*, not well-mannered adults, or even cute babies. Bruce loved immigrants, not Americans. He loved women in the church, not men. The laity, not the hierarchy. Bruce loved the poor, the gang banger, the unpopular, the homeless, the dropout, the gay, the atheist, the minority, and the abandoned dog. It seemed sometimes that Bruce only wanted to love the people that were *difficult* to love. But the fact is that all of us go through times when we are difficult to love. It was as if Bruce didn't have the time or patience to love everyone, and he wanted to love the people who needed it most. Bruce loved you when you were at your absolute worst, and he loved you more *because* you were at your absolute worst. He named his ministry Matthew 25. If you love Bruce, go and read it, and follow it. In it, we're told whenever we love the least of us, and at our least, we are

encountering and loving Christ himself. Another truth Bruce lived: Love is never earned, merited, or deserved; it is always freely given.

Last contradiction: Bruce was a saint, and yet he wasn't. I'll miss Fr. Bruce, we all will, but let's not try to canonize him. He was a saint, but not one in the sense that he would ever be canonized like St. Francis, and certainly not in the sense that he ever did anything that any of us couldn't do. He was a saint in the everyday sense that we all are, baptized Christians trying our best to follow the Lord. Following Matthew 25, he tried to be aware, take risks, and practice works of mercy. Bruce was a saint and a sinner, a contradiction. Jesus didn't come to call the righteous but sinners. I think deep down, each of us knows that we're not really as good as we think we at our best, and we're never as bad as we think at our worst. We're contradictions, and God loves us anyway. It is appropriate that we are celebrating today on the day that Jesus ascended to Heaven. We can pray and have confidence that Fr. Bruce follows Him.

Bruce loved Mary, our Mother. It was Simeon who told Mary that her son, Jesus, would be a *sign* of contradiction: Because he so loved the world, he would freely give himself on the Cross to a people who rejected him. That Cross, that love give us hope in the Resurrection. Bruce tried his best to share that Cross, Love, and Hope with us. Let's honor Bruce by trying *our* best to share it with others.