

# Turning the page

## DEAR FATHER KERPER, THIS ISN'T GOOD-BYE



**I**n a world that can often feel chaotic and rife with worry, we count on certain things to always be there — no matter what.

Like our favorite seat in our favorite diner with the waitstaff that knows our name, knows how we take our coffee and what we mean when we say *the usual*, or a favorite trail in the woods or along the seacoast, or an old reliable friend who understands our feelings without us having to speak.

For the past 16 years, faithful readers have turned to these pages of *Parable* counting on that kind of familiarity and assurance, and they have received it graciously from Father Michael Kerper, a columnist whose warmth and wisdom have greeted them since *Parable's* very first issue.

Through those years, the 100 responses to the questions addressed to *Dear Father Kerper* have provided much more to our readers than just informative and insightful clarifications of Church teachings, theological concepts, biblical passages and liturgical practices.

As an editor, I have had the privilege of being among the first to read and benefit personally from Father Kerper's columns, and I have asked myself over the years, what is the "much more" that he offers us?

What has made his column so popular that, while we ritually changed other columnists every few years to keep the magazine's content fresh, we recognized *Dear Father Kerper* as an editorial fixture that would remain as long as its author was willing to keep answering questions? What enabled us to publish a successful book collection of Father Kerper's columns in 2017 (*A Priest Answers 27 Questions You Never Thought to Ask*), and have him

continue to carry on as the questions kept rolling in?

Here, in essence, I believe, is the "much more" we have experienced from our very dear Father Kerper, and for which we can all be forever grateful: Father Kerper always spoke in relationship.

First, he spoke in relationship with his readers. Vastly knowledgeable but also pastoral in the very best sense of that word, Father Kerper always expressed empathy, compassion and concern for the person behind the question.

Some questioners earnestly sought clarification of a particular part of the catechism or Scripture that troubled them. Others, and Father Kerper always seemed to know this, were coming from a place of long-held hurt, anger or sorrow.

So, while he clarified and instructed — with relevant scriptures and documents always close at hand — he also counseled and consoled, told stories, offered assurances and provided a pathway to healing and hope.

Father Kerper also spoke in relationship with the persons in the Bible. The same empathy he brought to us, he also held for the people we encounter in the Gospels, Epistles and Hebrew Scriptures.

He encountered and brought them to us, not as abstract saints, but as flawed individuals with their own questions, both seeking and guiding us on the path toward God.

Finally, Father Kerper always spoke in relationship with a merciful and loving God, so no matter the specific answer he offered to a questioner, his response was always an invitation to prayerfully join him in the love and mystery of that relationship.

This is no eulogy. Father Kerper remains a vibrant and busy pastor at St. Patrick Parish in Nashua, where,

besides ministering in word and sacrament each day to his parishioners, he has dedicated considerable energy and vision to help feed and house the marginalized people in Nashua.

We wish him all of God's blessings in his continued ministries. And even as he steps away from his work as a regular columnist for *Parable*, we also promise, after giving him some rest, to do all we can to persuade him to be an occasional special contributor to the magazine.

Now what? Our editor, Rosemary Ford, and I have had months to ponder that question. We have entered into conversations with many people, including Bishop Peter Libasci and other leaders at the Diocese, as well as loyal readers and members of the *Parable* Advisory Board.

Rosemary has wisely observed that we never really "replace" someone in our lives, but we move forward with something new.

We are happy to announce that after prayerful searching, we discovered that something new not too far from home. Beginning with the May issue, we will be welcoming Father Francis McCarty, O.S.B., to the *Parable* team.

Father McCarty has committed to filling these pages with his own responses to questions we all have on our faith journeys. The title of his column will itself be a question that he says he frequently hears: *Hey Father, Got a Minute?*

Father McCarty was raised in Manville, Rhode Island, graduating from Mount Saint Charles Academy in Woonsocket. He came to New Hampshire to attend Saint Anselm College, where he majored in history with a minor in Catholic studies.

After graduation, he returned to Mount Saint Charles as a theology and computer science teacher. He came back to New Hampshire in 2015 to join the monastic community at Saint Anselm Abbey, discerning his way to the profession of solemn vows and ordination to the priesthood.

Father McCarty currently serves as Assistant Director of Campus Ministry at Saint Anselm College, where he attends to the daily spiritual needs of students and the wider community.

Father McCarty welcomes your questions about all aspects of our faith and promises to do his best to respond with the kind of compassion and insights that always take more than just "a minute" and often stay with us for a lifetime. ■

Consulting Editor Gary Bouchard helped launch *Parable*. He is a professor of English and the founding Executive Director of the Gregory J. Grappone Humanities Institute at Saint Anselm College. He's also the author of four books, including *Twenty Poems to Pray* (Liturgical Press 2019).



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