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An extraordinary man dies in Ordinary Time

Eugene Cullen Kennedy | Jul. 30, 2012 Bulletins from the Human Side

My wife and I only knew Aurelio Pangilinan from sitting near him, his wife and his children over the generation in which his two daughters and a son grew up and into lives of their own.

We felt that we knew them well, even though we were never in their home nor they in ours, and we never encountered each other around town. Yet we felt his loss as keenly as that of a lifelong friend when he died unexpectedly, fittingly enough on his way to a family reunion, a few weeks ago.

Aurelio, his former pastor, Msgr. Eugene Sears, told me, "was the kind of parishioner you wish you had more of," as he recalled his many good works, from the just and thoughtful ways he distributed parish tithes to those in real need in bad times to his making the annual parish picnic a treat for everyone in good times.

This extraordinary man's life was dedicated to and suffused by the soft light of Ordinary Time, that long liturgical stretch that, without a landmark feast such as Easter or Christmas, matches the ordinary time that, like the thousand small human exchanges that go unnamed but not unregistered in our depths, turn out to be the times that hold our lives together, the happy moments just beyond our grasp that we remember, the times we broke free of Time itself and lost ourselves in our love or our work.

That was Aurelio's time, the 24/7 of ordinary life that he transformed into a festival for his family, friends and co-workers. His gift, symbolized by his gentle smile, was to bear the light of the eternal, as others do the Olympic flame, to scatter the shadows that lie across the way ahead. He helped us see where we are going and to get our second wind -- for what is that but the energy of the Spirit? -- to complete our ordinary journey, despite its dizzying ascents and dead ends, to our goal.

Goodness is the right word for Aurelio because in an ancient Indo-European root, it means "fitting" or "suitable"; in a Germanic strain, "in a body"; or, in Old English, "together." So the root ripens in "to gather" and blooms in the Old English, "comrade," who is a friend who makes his way with us.

The word "comrade" comes originally from the Latin for to "bend toward," for that is what he did with those with whom he came in contact. He bent toward them, as one who does not place anything between himself and others does; he bent forward as a man who listens carefully to hear what are other people say and feel and hope for.

That is why Msgr. Sears associates Aurelio with the Beatitudes, for he lived them out, his purity of heart guaranteeing that he would see God, his being a peacemaker making him one of God's prized children.

Aurelio did all this without trying to make an impression and without seeking attention or praise. He did all this for us at a distance, for, if we never socialized with him and his wife and family, still we were attracted by their obvious devotion to each other and the happiness of the family members with each other.

In Aurelio, we discovered the wonder that is a profound religious experience and that is seldom found at church

gatherings or given off by processions of monsignors. That is the wonder that is the crop of ordinary time when it is lived fully as it was by Aurelio.

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