The text for the sermon is written in the 38th and 39th verses of the eighth chapter of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans: "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come...shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Those of you who knew Bishop McClean well will understand why I began the sermon that way. It was a familiar way for him to begin – and today it seems only right that I should borrow it from him.

I can almost hear him reminding me that the homily at a Requiem ought not to become merely a collection of stories about the person who has died. – In fact, we discussed this very briefly before his death. He looked at me and asked, "You know what I want?" And I said, "You know, I know what you want." To which he replied, "No pressure." – What he wanted was simple: that the purpose of a Christian funeral homily is to proclaim Christ – to proclaim the promises of God – and to remind the living of the hope that is ours through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. – And Bishop McClean would be right.

But I hope he will permit me a few personal words along the way.

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St. Paul begins this portion of Romans by speaking about what it means to belong to God: "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." We have received, he says, the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, "Abba, Father."

And perhaps the most important thing we can say about William McClean today is not that he was a bishop, not that he was a priest for more than forty years, not that he preached, taught, baptized, confirmed, absolved, married, buried, and celebrated countless Masses. – All of those things mattered greatly.

But the most important thing is that before he was a bishop, before he was a priest, he was a Christian – a child of God by adoption and grace. – And that is where our hope begins and resides.

And for me, that hope is deeply personal. Bishop McClean baptized me. He confirmed me. He ordained me. He married Debbie and me. – So, if something has gone wrong along the way, there is at least a fairly clear chain of responsibility.

But more seriously, in many ways my own walk with Christ began with him. I thought I knew Christ before I met then Father McClean. He helped me discover that I did not know Him nearly as

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well as I thought I did – and then, in his own way, he proceeded to make the introduction.

And he did that not only for me.

For more than forty years, that was the work to which he gave himself to – introducing people to Jesus Christ, over and over again. – At the font, at the altar, in the pulpit, beside hospital beds, at weddings and funerals, in serious conversations and probably in more than a few conversations that included a bad joke – he spent his ministry pointing people beyond himself to Christ.

And today the Church does the same for him. – We point beyond ourselves to Christ. – That is important because Christians do grieve.

When our Lord stood before the tomb of Lazarus, St. John tells us simply: "Jesus wept."

Jesus knew what He was about to do. – He had already said, "I am the resurrection, and the life." He knew the Father heard Him. He knew that Lazarus would come forth.

And still – Jesus wept.

That tells us something important about Christian grief.

The tears of Jesus were never separated from His confidence in the Father's power.

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He could grieve – and still trust.

He could weep – and still know that death would not have the final word. – And so can we.

St. Paul does not tell Christians that we should never grieve. He tells us elsewhere that we should not grieve "even as others which have no hope." – And in those words, there is a great difference.

Today we mourn. And we should. – We have lost someone we loved – a husband, a father, a grandfather, a friend, a priest, a bishop, a mentor.

But we do not mourn as though Christ remained in the tomb. – We do not mourn as though Good Friday were the end of the story. – We do not mourn as though death had accomplished something stronger than the love of God.

Bishop McClean knew that. – Throughout his struggle with cancer, his faith did not waver. – That does not mean that suffering was easy, or that cancer was somehow good. St. Paul never tells us that everything which happens to us is good.

He says something better: "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

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Cancer is not good. – Suffering is not good in itself. – Death is an enemy. – But none of them is beyond the power of God to redeem.

And St. Paul knew something about suffering. In this very chapter he speaks of tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, and sword.

Yet in the middle of all of it he asks: "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

And then he tells us why we can have such confidence: "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all…"

Our hope today does not rest upon William McClean having been a good man.

It does not rest upon his being a priest. – It does not rest upon his office as a bishop.

A collar does not save us. – A mitre does not save us.

Jesus Christ saves us.

And I know Bishop McClean would want that said clearly.

St. Paul continues – "It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."

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Christ died. – Christ rose. – Christ reigns. – Christ intercedes for His people.

That is the foundation beneath everything we do here today.

And then St. Paul asks the question that brings this whole passage to its climax – "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"

Tribulation? – No.

Distress? – No.

Cancer? – No.

Not even death.

"Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us." – Notice that St. Paul does not say Christians avoid these things. – We are not more than conquerors because we are spared from suffering. We are more than conquerors because suffering cannot separate us from Christ.

And finally, St. Paul gives us this assurance – "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life...nor things present, nor things to come...nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

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Neither death. – That is the word for us today.

Death has separated Bishop McClean from our sight. – It has not separated him from Christ.

Death has brought his earthly ministry to its end. – It has not brought the promises of God to an end.

Death has silenced the voice that preached the Gospel, pronounced absolution, blessed marriages, and spoke the words of consecration at the altar. – But it cannot silence the Word upon whom all those words depended.

And so we grieve – but we grieve in hope.

So today, we give thanks for William McClean – for the bishop and priest, certainly – but also for the father, friend and mentor who helped so many of us know Jesus Christ more deeply.

I will always be grateful that he made that introduction for me.

And today we hold fast to the promise he preached for more than forty years – Christ has died – Christ is risen.

And nothing – not suffering, not cancer, not even death itself – "shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

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Thanks be to God.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

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