

Take A Sad Song And Make It Better

I was very honored to join with the church choir this morning as we said farewell to one of our own. Mark lost his long battle with the nasty "c" word this past week. I first learned of his condition almost half a year ago when I began my own recuperation. Mark's 59 years (while only a blink of an eye) were lived with love, hard work, and a lot of fun.

Until being struck by the illness, he and Barb faithfully climbed the steps to join us on the Sunday mornings we sang at services. He also was an avid classic car enthusiast and the procession outside church this morning was a testament to that (I will not display my ignorance and even attempt to name the makes and models). He was also a passionate music fan. In years past, Mark and a select group of gentlemen made up Stevie and the Studebakers (a 50's-60s doo-wop group). Not entirely sure what became of the group (and their barbershop equivalent, The Edgertones) but they were great fun to watch.

I was still young in their heyday.

Father Art... in the short time he has presided over our masses, he has really endeared himself to the congregation. His message today was full of meaning and a bit of laughter as they have been for the last month or two. He went to a corner and pulled out his 1951 "Something-or-other" saxophone and mashed together three classic 60s tunes ("Blue Moon," "Mbube," and "Hey Jude"), the first two of which had been performed by the Studebakers. The Beatles hit was Mark and Barb's "song." Although Mark and Father Art only knew each other a short time, they are both the same age and were born in the same era. Never pretending to know him anymore than he did, Father described a man who really took "sad songs and made them better." Later, the sax joined the organ and choir for "How Great Thou Art."

The choir sang songs hand picked by Barb (and Mark I am sure) including "Oh, Holy Night." You may ask why in the middle of August one would choose to have a Christmas carol sang at a funeral. I have been honored to have attended two in which the untraditional seemed traditional. Another tribute to Mark's legacy was the number of choir members who sang this morning. Usually, we have no more than ten. We had double that and more today, even some from a neighboring parish.

Another good guy to join the heavenly chorus. May we all strive to make our own sad songs better.