

December 9, 2021

## Eulogy by Maureen A. Baggott

*In memory of her brother, Fr. David John Ayotte (1960–2021).*

I'd like to start by warning all of you in advance that this will not be your typical Eulogy. David even called it a "spiritual reflection" when he outlined his funeral mass. I also ask your forgiveness for its length. For the play by play of Dave's life achievements I encourage you to see Dave's obituary which was so beautifully crafted by Jim Arena and Dave's other close friends. It's available on Saint Monica's website.

First, I'd like to thank everyone near and far for being with us here today as we celebrate the life of my brother, Fr. David John Ayotte. Dave was, as you've all witnessed a remarkable human being, "special" is what I hear most often when people speak of him. He had a charisma that drew people to him and an unpretentious air about him that put people instantly at ease. I can reassure all of you that he passed peacefully into God's arms on Monday evening, November 29th, having been free from pain for the first time in months during his last 3 days. He is finally at peace! My families thanks to all the Doctors and nurses that made this gentle passing possible! Each of you are a blessing to each and every soul you treat. I, thank-you from the bottom of my heart!

Gratefully, I was able to spend those last three days by his side. A comforting presence for each other, like always. He was still well enough to know I was there and share a few teasing moments together. He even teased Fr. Prosper when he visited Dave on Saturday. Dave loved to tease! At one point during our time together I told him I would walk him to the gate with the strong admonition that once on the other side he'd better start praying for me immediately because I was promoting him to the job of being my guardian angel as soon as he was in Heaven! In actuality, he's a guardian angel now for all of us. His lifelong commitment to serving others and drawing them closer to God lives on in every single life he's touched and in every life we touch in return. That is truly one of the great gifts of his life.

Fr Prosper asked me Friday, as he was Ubering me to the rectory from the airport, "what was it about our upbringing that formed the man that Fr. Dave became? What did our parents do that was different?" After a minute or 2, I had to say I didn't know. We had a very normal family growing up in the 60's and 70's. Rick and Dave fought regularly, we teased and tormented each other mercilessly. Dave would lock himself in the bathroom while Rick tried to pick the lock to quote "beat him up", while I tried to referee, coaching Dave on which of the doors Rick was trying to open, and Lori well she just tried to stay out of the fray. We went camping and fishing as family, played out in the street with the other kids on the block till dark. We did all the stuff that most of you have probably experienced too. If David was special at that time we really didn't notice, I guess we were each too busy finding our own way in the world too notice. Yet, despite whatever sibling conflicts we may have had, we were all very close. As a matter of fact Dave's cremains will be buried right next to Ricks. they'll even share the same headstone. My husband jokingly commented

that now they can torment each other into perpetuity. All kidding aside, Dave and I were especially close. As kids, He was always willing to be my "student" when we played school, especially when we got our new school supplies, he'd help me proof my essays or listened to me go on and on about what I was learning in my philosophy class when I was in college. We were always there for each other. Our closeness never stopped growing and continued to deepen over the years, regardless of any distance or time apart, to the extent that today a part of him actually lives on in me. Now, that's not some type of metaphor, it's a fact. Some of you already know the story...but, back in 2009 I was diagnosed with stage four Kidney failure and told I needed to begin dialysis immediately. Dave hated seeing me on dialysis for 4 to 5 hours a day and the 5 days a week that was necessary. He decided he wanted to donate one of his kidneys to me, provided of course that he was a match. At the time he was living in Italy and teaching at the Gregorian in Rome. It wasn't until he was sent by the Jesuits to teach the seminarians at Hekima College in Kenya that arrangements could finally be made for the necessary testing to be done at UCLA . This process started on his vacation in June of 2012 and culminated in the living donor transplant I received from him on January 2nd 2013. I distinctly remember my Surgeon telling me post transplant what a perfect kidney it was and that it began producing urine immediately after he hooked it up; to which I replied "of course it did, after all it is a Holy kidney. Today, I'm happy to say that my holy kidney has had no problems whatsoever in almost 9 years. And my brothers gift of love and freedom lives on in me. That's just more evidence of the generosity of spirit that dwelled within Dave. I know that many of you have your own Dave stories to cherish, and I pray that each of you hold them close and continue to let them guide you.

It's in the spirit of Dave's homilies and "stories" that I'd like to share some parts of an essay Dave wrote in college. Many of you will be surprised to know that Dave was quite an accomplished pianist having learned to play in his early teens. I found this essay when I got home in a photo album that he had sent to our Uncle Desi for Christmas in 1979. It's really quite amazing. The setting is early 1980, David was only 19 at that time and at one of the major crossroads he would face in his life. I personally believe, it's at this time that he began the discernment process which would ultimately lead him to the priesthood, and ultimately to all of you that have known him. This is some of what he wrote in that essay:

"The piano in its struggle to make verbal my feelings yelled out. With each pounding octave the frustration within me was made clearer and clearer. Who are you? What is important? Are not your desires just for yourself?", shouted the ivory. "Politics, is it the answer? Christ is he the answer? Upon what or who do you have faith? What or who are you going to serve?"

These questions certainly did not receive an immediate answer; at least not verbally from myself, nor musically from the piano. They were left there, no longer within the depths of myself, but in full reach of all my faculties.

September 1979 seems far away now and not the six month reality that time places on it; but the significance that day had on me is still remembered. It is common for the piano to do my talking, but rarely had it ever been so articulate. This day marked a recognizing of the conflict of two goals in my life - one being my desire to enter international politics as a career, and the other being my

desire to serve Christ. It is possible for these two goals to unite, but in my case they did not. My mind sided with politics; my heart was unsure; and my soul sought unity with Christ. The piano as an expression of my heart, remained neutral and only expressed the conflict going on within myself. The next few months marked an intensification in the discernment process that had begun in high school. Who was David Ayotte beyond all the masks and barriers? In the search to know myself I am attempting to become a more complete person. Complete in the Sense of becoming more harmonious with the reality of myself, my true self. This discernment process and the movement towards becoming my real self is what is referred to as "becoming more fully human."

My journey for self encompasses the ideas of Merton, Benedict, Jean Vanier, Mother Theresa, my family, teachers, friends, environment, and so much more. I am a mélange that is unique. The ideas I have presented are best for me, and they are not expressive of how the world should act or respond to her own questions. But just as my life has been built upon those of others, I hope that mine can be a part of those whom I touch physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually."

After completing some basic necessities in discernment you will find that you're not any closer to yourself than you were before; only, however, you will have discovered a road. You cannot see the end of your journey. It's in the distance... shrouded in darkness. Others refer to this as being a desert, but a desert is only white darkness.

The commencement of your journey is a personal step. The decision is only yours. You are now simply free to become more human. In the search for yourself you are hoping to find a better person, a self who can live in joy, a self who can love others as well as themselves.

By abandoning one's illusions of purpose, and in the acceptance of one's own weaknesses one's self-esteem shrinks to the greater reality. The magnitude of nature, life, the universe bring a feeling of smallness. Continually becoming smaller leads eventually to one point... nothingness. It is at this point that you realize your own insignificance, and your "self" dies. It is also the point where a great wonder takes place. God loves you. He envelops your entire soul. Your "self" and nothingness give way to becoming part of the universe, a part of God. The empty shell of your body becomes filled. In place of the black space, you are filled, a star develops; and the light that is in you now, is God expressing his love, reaching out to be seen, felt, and loved in return. The flute sings because of the wind passing through it and not because of the flute itself.

Being touched by God is a gift from Him. It is not you that moves His spirit, because you do not exist. The emptiness that is created from your self's death is filled by God. Your faults and "old" self still control your body; but in that moment where you no longer exist, you see the true purpose and goal of your being- - to become united with God.

Tears are all I can give to those who stop in their journey before the realization of God. They remain small but too afraid to die to themselves. They are not quite empty; and, therefore, cannot know the fullness of God. They remain alone in their desert.

The love that pours out of you comes from your soul; and expands as it reaches to fill the other dimensions of your body. Your mind seeks to understand God, your heart to express God, and your physical body to act in His will.

It is in Jesus Christ that the mind, heart, and physical body know God. Through His words, actions, and total love for us, our Christ, who lives in us as the Holy Spirit, pours out into the rest of our body. Jesus is the door in achieving a greater love of God and an ability to do His will.

Jesus restores the relationship between men and God that was destroyed as a result of our sinfulness. Our imperfections have prevented us from being one with God; Christ is our intermediary, because He both God and man.

Initially we began a search for who we were; and now it seems we are no longer ourselves but someone else. The reality is that we have always been Christ living in a false image of self. The construct of our facades and pride have built up an illusion to this truth.

Becoming fully Christian is becoming one's true self. Upon reaching this point of oneness with Christ, we have finally become united with the light we were always striving for, and have become...fully human.

Quite amazing for a 19 year old! But, then, that's David. His life is a testament of his willingness to forgo "self" to be united with God and to be a vessel leading others into that same emptiness which allows each of us to experience the fullness of God. I'm fortunate or should I say blessed to have shared all the major events in his life; and, as his sister witness his formation into the fully human disciple he became. For each of us he will always remain fully human, truly loved and extraordinarily special. For me, I will miss my baby brother every day for the rest of my life until such time that we are reunited in Christ.

Words are woefully inadequate in expressing my families love and gratitude to each of you for supporting my brother and helping him carry his cross of cancer to the end. I know as he does, that he couldn't have done it without the love and prayers of this incredible community of Saint Monica's and all the friends and family that have surrounded him on his last journey. Again, my love and thanks to each of you.