



The Blue Jay



Special Memorial Edition

Volume 89, No. 2

Passing of a spiritual leader

*ALS claims life
of former president,
beloved educator*

By **Jonathan LeBrun**
News Editor

The Rev. Raymond R. Fitzgerald, S.J., a Jesuit priest, mentor, educator and beloved friend to so many in the Jesuit High School community, died on Sept. 17, of complications from amyotrophic lateral sclerosis. He was 58.

Fr. Fitzgerald served as president of Jesuit from 2011 to 2014, stepping down after being diagnosed with ALS, commonly known as Lou Gehrig's disease.

"Fr. Fitzgerald's wisdom, sense of humor, and empathy for others made a significant impact wherever he served," the Rev. Anthony McGinn, S.J., said in a statement. Fr. McGinn returned in 2014 to serve as interim president of the school.

"I am personally grateful to him because his leadership and insight have left a mark on me, countless others and Jesuit High

School. Please remember him and his family in your prayers."

Fr. Fitzgerald died at the St. Alphonsus Rodriguez Pavilion, part of St. Charles College in Grand Coteau, La., the Jesuit retreat center, college and infirmary, where he had been living since June of last year.

Fr. Fitzgerald was preceded in death by his father, Raymond R. Fitzgerald Sr.

He is survived by his mother, Mary Fitzgerald, and his sister, Lucy Smedstad, both of Slidell.

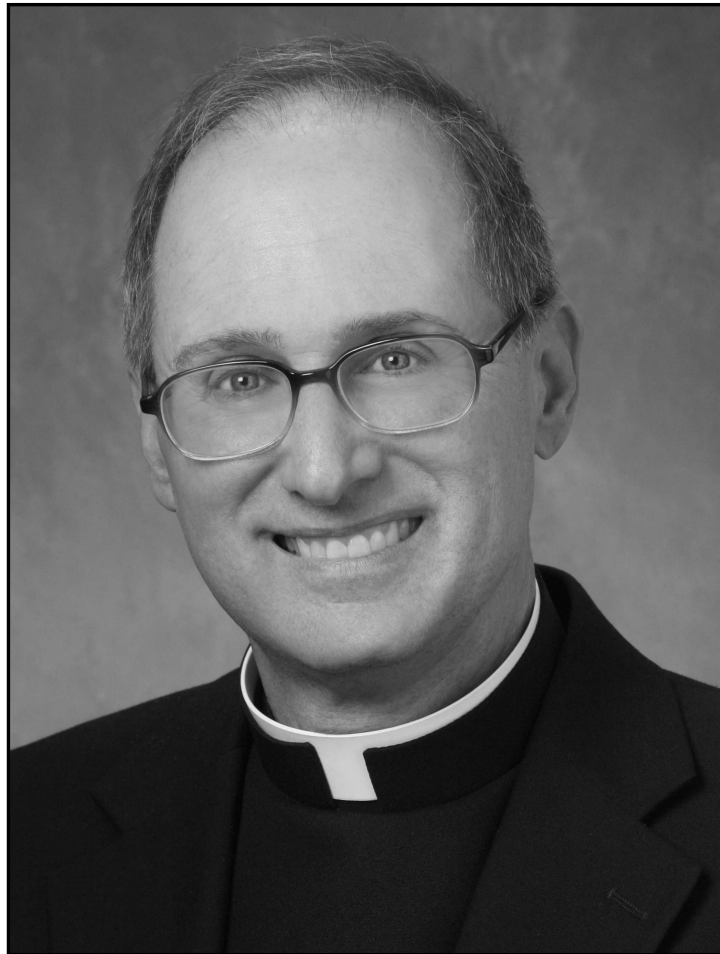
A funeral Mass was celebrated on Sept. 24 at St. Charles Borromeo Church in Grand Coteau, with burial following at the Jesuit Cemetery at St. Charles College.

In a recent interview, Fr. McGinn recalled what he said was the biggest lesson he learned from his former student and long-time colleague and brother priest.

"Listen to others carefully and be attentive," Fr. McGinn said.

He also noted how Fr. Fitzgerald's final lesson was in

Fr. Raymond R. Fitzgerald, S.J.



July 13, 1958 - Sept. 17, 2016

facing the cross of his illness with courage, hope and faith. The last time the two spoke, he said, he was maintaining "an upbeat, positive attitude."

Raymond R. Fitzgerald Jr. was born in New Orleans on July

13, 1958, to Mary Fitzgerald, a professor at Loyola University, and Raymond Fitzgerald, a ship-ping accountant.

Growing up in the Broadmoor neighborhood, he was a parishioner of St. Matthias

Catholic Church.

After attending the New Orleans Academy for elementary school, in 1971 he enrolled at Jesuit High School, the beginning

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Even amid his duties as president, Fr. Fitzgerald regularly found the time to spend with students throughout his day.

He touched our lives with grace, always reflecting the love of God

By **Donald Barrett**
Editor-in-Chief

Fr. Raymond Fitzgerald, S.J., was an amazing man and a servant of God. He always sought ways to help all those around him.

An Editorial

With this dedication, he left a profound mark not only on Jesuit High School but on each Blue Jay whose life he touched.

More than 40 years ago, Fr. Fitzgerald walked the halls of Jesuit as a student – an experience that allowed him to develop

a special relationship with new Blue Jays.

Jesuit is, for many eighth and ninth graders, significantly larger than their elementary schools, which makes adjusting difficult for these new students.

A number of them come without knowing a single other

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Memories of a life well lived

Upon learning of Fr. Raymond Fitzgerald's death, those who knew him – students past and present, colleagues, brother priests, friends – reached out to share stories of favorite memories and encounters that embodied the life of a kind and humble man of God. Through social media postings, emails and individual conversations, here are some of the ways that we remember Fr. Fitz.

Fr. Fitzgerald was an amazing man who was such a huge influence on so many lives. He taught us how to be humble and charitable through his example. He taught us how to look for good in everyone, as St. Ignatius did. He taught us how to offer up any suffering joyfully to God. He taught us how to put God first in our lives. He had a presence about himself that drew others to God. He lived his life in total obedience to God's will and did it with such joy. His sense of humor was amazing and was one of his most endearing qualities.

Every time I go into the small chapel at Jesuit and I see the beauty of the renovation, I smile and think of him, and feel a great deal of joy. Every time I hear the *Suscipe* prayer, I also smile and think of him.

I am a better person for having known Fr. Fitzgerald and I am thankful to God for having the privilege of knowing him, working with him, and being able to call him friend.

Kathy Juhas
Academic Assistant Principal

I may say more later if I can get anything I could possibly say together, but for now, Fr. Fitz, I'm going to go with the only thing I think you would not be embarrassed to hear from me: Thank you. I'm going to trust that you understand all I mean when I say that. You always have.

Bradley James
Class of 2011

I will always remember Fr. Fitzgerald as one of the most intelligent and kindest persons that I have ever met. His students, their parents and the faculty all appreciated him in both his teaching as well as his administrative duties.

He had a way of making those around him feel very comfortable in his presence. He was also so humble in his mannerisms. He accepted and handled his sickness with such grace. Fr. Fitzgerald had so much to offer to so many.

Andrew Schiro
Guidance counselor

Fr. Fitzgerald was a special person, the sort that one may meet perhaps once in a lifetime and whose influence will linger for decades. Always sharp with a twinkle of wit in his eyes, he had a knack for surprising you whenever he talked, providing some new perspective or trinket of information from his many, well-

read years. As a confessor, he was kind, understanding, and wise. While it is a shame for disease to take such a great person, I cannot help but think that there was no better man to have borne such a burden.

Ian Calamari
Class of 2014

He was calm, holy, and funny! We were all blessed to know him – and now he's even closer to God, so he's in the express lane with our prayers and needs!

Kathi Tomeny
Retired Mathematics teacher

While the very faith Fr. Fitz formed in me transforms this "goodbye" into an "I'll see you again," I am nonetheless heartbroken to lose him. In 2011, he sat down with me for a four-hour conversation that would not only overcome my thoughts of agnosticism, but would set up the seven-year spiritual direction relationship that has changed my life forever. His legacy is love and will live on in its ever-creative nature in me and everyone I ever love.

Father, I already miss your immediate assistance on earth, but look forward to your speedy intercession from heaven. But let us turn to the hope of faith by our mutually favorite C. S. Lewis quote: "All their life in this world and all their adventures had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before."

As we said every time we departed from each other, "I'll see you again in the Lord's time."

Christopher Wilson

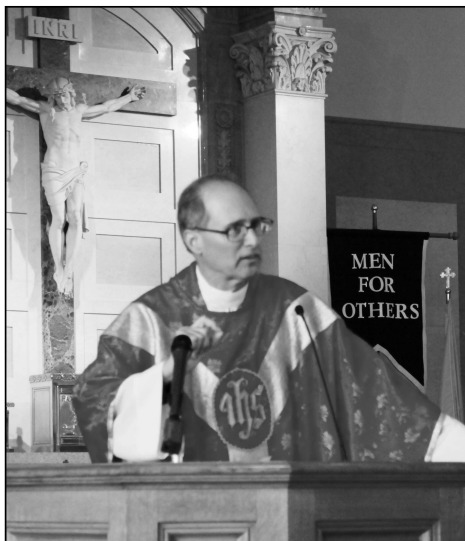
Class of 2014

When Fr. Fitzgerald left Jesuit for Dallas in 2003, he wrote a personal message to every student he had either taught or ministered to in some way. It was incredible that he said something very personal about that student to each one as he was wishing them the best as he moved on to another assignment with the Society of Jesus. With such personal touches, Fr. Fitzgerald seemed to have an aura of spirituality so genuine yet so mystical.

Aurora Daigle
Guidance counselor

My family will be forever grateful for having known Fr. Fitzgerald. Two memories we will always cherish. When we were devastated with Hurricane Katrina and the loss of our home, Fr. Fitzgerald helped and guided us in the direction we would take. We spoke to him several times as his kind words and encouragement led us to Dallas and the Jesuit school there. Those four months gave us hope in the midst of great difficulties.

The second memory was my



Fr. Raymond Fitzgerald, S.J., delivers his homily at the Mass of the Holy Spirit at the start of the 2013 school year.

son's wedding. He had asked Fr. Fitzgerald to celebrate it, but as his disease became worse, we weren't sure if he would be able to participate. While we enlisted Fr. John Brown's help to say the Mass, Fr. Fitzgerald was determined to preach the homily. His beautiful words, spoken with great difficulty, will never be forgotten. We thank God always for allowing us to know and experience this very good man.

Steve Hayes
Social Studies teacher

During my freshman year studying Classics at the University of Notre Dame, I was recuperating from surgery at Children's Hospital when I got an unexpected visit from Fr. Fitzgerald, then the president of Jesuit High School, who was a Classics major himself. He was always looming there in the shadows when I was at Jesuit as this highly intellectual figure. But I most remember his kindness, coming to visit me after I had surgery, and we talked about the Classics. He was a true mentor.

Brian Credo Jr.
Class of 2011

The longest chat I had with Fr. Fitzgerald was in my eighth-grade year. I will remember it forever. I made an appointment to chat about my own vocation because I was thinking about the priesthood. Fr. Fitz told me his vocation story, what going to the priesthood meant for him and why he loved working with young people. It was then that I could see why so many students and alumni remained in contact with him over the years. There was no issue that I could bring to him that he would be able to help me with.

Toward the end of my freshman year, I started attending daily masses in the second-floor chapel. During his weekly Mass, it started becoming obvious that some of the parts of the Mass were not very easy for him to

perform anymore. I know he cherished every Mass he got to say for students. I was also fortunate enough to serve his last Mass as school president.

The last email I have from him said, "Let us continue to ask God for the grace to know and to do His will." That is very indicative of all the lessons he tried to teach his students over the years. To know God's will, we simply have to ask.

Will Matthews
Class of 2017

There are few people about which you can say with all sincerity that "he was truly a living saint." Fr. Fitzgerald was certainly one of those men.

In my life, I have been blessed to know him in a variety of capacities: as a spiritual father, a teacher, a brother in the Society of Jesus, and a colleague. It was an honor to be able to share so many wonderful years of my life with him at Jesuit High School. He was a wonderful person: humble, kind-hearted, brilliant, with an incredible sense of humor.

I recently learned that Fr. Fitz had a particularly strong devotion to St. Robert Bellarmine, on whose feast he died. Bellarmine wrote a book called "The Art of Dying Well." In that, he lists 10 precepts. The very first is that in order to die well, one must live well. I can think of no man who lived well and became more perfected by the grace of God than Fr. Fitz. I can think of no man that died with more grace and trust in the Lord than Fr. Fitz.

To mourn over his own condition would make himself the center, and for this man of faith, that would be unthinkable. The least important person in the world for Raymond Fitzgerald was Raymond Fitzgerald. For him, love for and trust in God was the most important thing. That love for God drove him to be the great man for others that he was. And of those of us that

were positively influenced by his presence in our life, we could not be more grateful.

Scott Delatte
Theology teacher, Class of 2006

These are two of the many memories I have of Fr. Fitzgerald. First, I have always found it amusing and ironic that I was actually Fr. Fitzgerald's boss when I was chairman of the Classics department, before he even became my boss as president of Jesuit High School. I had no business being his boss.

Secondly, in January of 1997 he once taught all of my classes for a week when I was a first-year teacher so that I could go on my honeymoon. I have always been indebted to him for this. I still remember what he said to me before I left that Friday to get married: "Mitch, congratulations! Enjoy your honeymoon. The only promise I can make is that your students will know no less Latin upon your return than they do today."

When he left Jesuit in 2003, he wrote me this note. I don't keep too many things, but I cherish this now more than ever. It hangs in my classroom and it embodies Fr. Fitzgerald – humble, grateful and to the point.

*Dear Mitch,
Just a few lines to thank you for all your support here and for your leadership of the department in these past years. I have always enjoyed your collegiality and company.*

All the best for the upcoming year.

*Sincerely,
Raymond*

Mitch Chapoton
Classics teacher, Class of 1987

Whenever my siblings or I shared our plans, a comment, an opinion, or just a wish with our dad, Verne Tripp, he often responded with the words "To be sure." We took it as his approval or just a signal that he was listening. During the time when he was in hospice care and we knew his end was near, my niece told him she would be back to see him the next day. His response, even in a haze of palliative medication, was "To be sure." Those were his last known words as he passed away during that night.

Fr. Fitzgerald agreed to celebrate the Mass for our dad. In speaking with him about Daddy, I mentioned in passing those last words. At the Mass, Fr. Fitzgerald focused his homily on those words "To be sure." More eloquently than I can remember now, he compared them to "So be it" or "Amen," a closure to the prayer that was Daddy's life.

My siblings and I deeply appreciated how Fr. Fitzgerald personalized his sermon. It was a source of great comfort at the time and a memory of Fr. Fitzgerald's wisdom and kindness that we will never forget.

Liddy Tripp Hanemann
*Administrative assistant,
Admissions and Athletics*

Fr. Fitzgerald a Jesuit for 36 years

*Much of his life spent
at Carrollton and Banks*

Fitzgerald

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of a lifelong connection.

At Carrollton and Banks, Ray Fitzgerald was a member of the National Honor Society as well as a National Merit Finalist.

In his senior year, he was the copy editor of the *Blue Jay Annual*.

He also participated in many co-curriculars, including the Chess Club, and Prep Quiz Bowl, both moderated by the then Mr. McGinn, who was on the faculty before his own ordination.

Also serving as his senior homeroom teacher, Fr. McGinn remembered the young Fitzgerald as "a quiet, friendly and studious student" during his time wearing the khaki uniform.

Following graduation from Jesuit as part of the Class of 1976, he attended Loyola University, earning undergraduate degrees in history and classics.

Upon leaving Loyola, he entered the Society of Jesus on Aug. 14, 1980.

After making his first vows, he continued his studies at St. Louis University, earning a master's degree in history.

He completed his theological studies at the Weston School of Theology in Cambridge, Mass., in 1990, also attaining a master's degree in religious education from Boston College in 1991.

During his formation as a Jesuit, he also taught at Jesuit College Preparatory in Dallas from 1984 to 1987.

Fr. Fitzgerald was ordained as a priest at Spring Hill College in Mobile, Ala., on June 8, 1991.

He pronounced his final vows on Dec. 8, 1999, here in the Chapel of the North American Martyrs.



Ray Fitzgerald
Class of '76

Following ordination, he taught at Jesuit, and later served as rector of the Jesuit community here.

During his tenure, he taught classes in Latin, Greek, English and theology, and served as the school's chaplain.

In 2003, he returned to Jesuit College Prep in Dallas, serving as superior of that community, and later was appointed to serve as the assistant to the provincial, the head of the New Orleans Province of the Society of Jesus from 2007 to 2011.

In 2010, Fr. Fitzgerald was named the 15th president of Jesuit High School, assuming the post at the start of the 2011-12 academic year.

Among the major accomplishments of his time as president included the restoration of the Holy Name of Jesus Chapel and the creation of the strategic plan, that will enable the school to continue its mission for years to come.

Fluent in several languages, Fr. Fitzgerald was an avid reader, sometimes reading three books at once – each in a different language.

Friends also recalled his enjoyment of going out to dinner at many of the city's great restaurants.

He also was a movie fan. His sense of humor was evident even in referencing zombie films in his homilies.

Throughout his life, he was a man of God whose faith was strong and loving.

As we look back upon his life, we remember the times that he made us laugh, think and appreciate all that God has given us.



As a member of the Class of 1976, Ray Fitzgerald was a leader with the Christian Life Community. He is shown here, second from left, with other members of the group's executive committee and moderator, Fr. Joe Reising.



Ever a teacher, even when he returned to Jesuit to assume the post as president of the school, Fr. Fitzgerald also returned to the classroom. His theology course on the writings of C.S. Lewis was a popular senior elective.

We realize that he embodied the same characteristics that he instilled in his students, even into his final days.

At the morning assembly on Jan. 15, 2014, in which he announced his diagnosis and intention to step down as president, he spoke of that faith and quoted St. Ignatius' *Suscipe* prayer:

"The purpose of our being here is to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord. God gives us the means of doing this each day.

Good or ill health doesn't enter into it," Fr. Fitzgerald said.

"With the witness of my life, I wish to assure that this is true. It is true because of the closing line of Ignatius' prayer, 'Take and receive.'

"The prayer concludes with the line, 'Give me only Your love and Your grace; that is enough.'

"It is true that God never fails to give us His love and His grace."

**For further
memories of
Fr. Raymond
Fitzgerald, S.J.,
through his years at
Jesuit, view the
photo galleries at
www.jesuitnola.org**

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What can you do to help in the fight against ALS?

The illness that claimed the life of Fr. Raymond Fitzgerald, S.J., remains incurable. But advances in the development of treatments are being made.

You can help. The annual Walk to Defeat ALS will take place in Audubon Park on Oct. 22. Participation is free, and walkers raise money by signing up sponsors.

The J Squad, Jesuit's walk team, is captained by science teacher Amy Tassin. It has a team goal of raising \$7,500. To make a donation or to join the team, contact Tassin for more information.

You also can sign up directly at ALSA.org, and click on the "Get Involved" link. When you reach "New Orleans walk," select "View all teams" and click

on "J Squad."

Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis is a progressive neurodegenerative disease that affects nerve cells in the brain and the spinal cord, leading to weaken and potentially paralyzed muscles. It first gained notoriety when it struck New York Yankee Lou Gehrig in 1939. It is the illness that now afflicts former New Orleans Saint Steve Gleason.

Approximately 5,600 people in the United States are diagnosed with ALS each year, an incidence rate of two per 100,000 people. It is estimated that as many as 30,000 Americans may have the disease at any given time.

For more information, visit ALSA.org or teangleason.org

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In his own words

On Jan. 15, 2014, a special morning assembly was held in the Traditions Courtyard. There, Fr. Raymond Fitzgerald, S.J., announced to the student body that he had been diagnosed with ALS, known as Lou Gehrig's disease. He was frank about the prognosis and expected course the illness would take. With grace and his customary sense of humor, however, he also revealed the courage and faith that he would display throughout the remainder of his life.

That deep trust in the love of God, which he expressed in the words we reprint here, continue to inspire us all.

Good morning, gentlemen. Yesterday I spoke with the faculty and staff and emailed your parents about my medical diagnosis of ALS.

This morning I would like to speak directly to you.

The disease has both a short-term and a long-term reality. Looking at the long-term, let's get the bad news out of the way first.

With no cure, ALS proceeds to greater loss of muscle functions. The good news is that cognitive functions remain. Moreover, the process takes its time, and the disease can move along in a gradual, not to say, stately pace.

I am currently doing what I can to slow it down via medication and physical therapy.

That said, I would like to focus this morning on the short-term. My plan is to continue as president for the remainder of this school year and to remain at Jesuit beyond that as long as feasible.

I am certainly quite open, should anyone wish to, to talking about my condition. However, I do not consider ALS and its effects to be the sole, or even primary, topic of conversation we can have. There are a variety of other interesting and instructive items that we can chat about: New Orleans' restaurants, the care and feeding of zombies, and Greek verbs, to name but three.

At present, I am blessed to be able to do my duty today. For, each day, God gives to each of us both the opportunity to serve Him and the means of so doing. And therefore, my good brothers, this morning I desire to offer some-



Fr. Raymond Fitzgerald, S.J., addresses a morning assembly on Jan. 15, 2014, in which he announced his diagnosis of ALS, and his plans to step down as president of Jesuit High School.

thing to you and to ask something from you.

To you, I wish to offer my personal witness to two items from the spiritual arsenal of St. Ignatius: Principle and Foundation and the *Suscipe* prayer – the prayer “Take, Lord, receive.”

The purpose of our being here is to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord. God gives us the means of doing this each day. Good or ill health doesn't enter into it. With the witness of my life, I wish to assure that this is true. It is true because of the closing line of Ignatius' prayer, “Take and receive.” The prayer concludes with the line “give me only Your love and Your grace; that is enough.” It is true that God never fails to give us His love and His grace.

From you, I wish to ask three things.

The first is your help. You have the strength and energy that I will increasingly lack. Second, your prayers—something that we can always do for one another. The third is quite simply your being yourselves—yourselves both as you are and as God is



Following the address, in which Fr. Fitzgerald spoke with candor, grace and good humor, many of the deeply moved students greeted him, offering appreciative support and prayers.

forming you to be.

Harbor no doubts about how good you are and can be. Harbor no doubts about what a source of encouragement, joy, and consolation you are to me. God has given me, in my life, many blessings. Among the greatest of these is sharing these years with you.

Now, certainly, you can be entertaining, enlivening, and engaging; but beyond that, I have come to realize that I am privileged to be here at Jesuit at a time when I can stand in the hallway and find myself in the presence of saints. For, saints do walk among us in greater numbers than one might

suspect. Sainthood is truly how good you are capable of becoming.

And so, the longer term future will be what it is. This day, each one of us has a task in becoming the person God calls us to be today. Let us now be about this task.

‘Fr. Fitz’ always sought to understand his Blue Jays

Editorial

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classmate.

Fr. Fitzgerald seemed to gravitate towards all of these students and sought to help them in the transition from their previous schools.

As a teacher who believed in the importance of understanding his students, he took the time to learn the names of each Blue Jay – a task that he accomplished remarkably fast – and get to know each

personally. For many of those lucky enough to have met him, Fr. Fitzgerald often was the first person at Jesuit with which they established a relationship.

“Fr. Fitz,” as he was affectionately known, served as a figure for students to look up to, exemplifying wisdom, faith, love, and selflessness.

Using his characteristic dry sense of humor, he prepared students for the challenges of the real world by sharing his advice on everything from their faith lives to preparations for the zombie apocalypse.

Most importantly though, he exemplified every value he taught, even while in

the midst of his battle with ALS.

The most striking aspects of his personality were his love and devotion to God.

One of the most apparent indicators of the humble and gracious type of man that he had been was his response to simple question, “How are you?”

In his sincere appreciation for the gift of life, he would, despite his affliction, still respond with “better than I deserve.”

While Fr. Fitzgerald was still in residence at Jesuit, his colleague and caretaker, Fr. John Brown, S.J., said he only saw him cry once over the course of his battle.

The tears, however, were not driven by pain or self-pity.

Through his sense of hope and faith, he was overwhelmed by the thought of the vast pleasure of God's love that awaited him in heaven after death.

While we mourn his passing, all who loved him and were inspired by his life can find some solace and comfort in knowing that Fr. Raymond Fitzgerald is now free to enjoy the sheer happiness from an eternity with God that he had once only envisioned.

May he rest in peace.