

**Light, Friend, Shepherd: Funeral Homily for Fr. John J. Carroll, S.J.**  
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**Oratory of St. Ignatius, Loyola House of Studies**  
**July 21, 2014**

Fr. Jack Carroll's favorite song was "Danny Boy." Whenever the song was sung for him in celebrations especially at the Institute on Church and Social Issues (ICSI), he would explain that the song is so dear to Irish Americans like himself because it evokes memories of the Emerald Isle. Please do not worry, I do not intend to sing it now, because both the song and my singing voice are terribly unliturgical. But we keep the song in mind for it speaks of both farewells and reunions, and how memories of home keep hope alive. As we bid farewell to Fr. Jack, we ease our pain by affirming our faith in the great reunion of the resurrection. Just as the song recalls the beauty of the Irish homeland, we too call to mind all that was good and beautiful in Fr. Jack's long and fruitful life.

First, we turn to our reading from the book of Wisdom, where the souls of the just are vividly described as sparks flying from flame, bouncing through stubble. Fr. Jack was one such spark of light, radiant and bright, but always drawing its iridescence from the blaze of God's love and compassion. We give thanks for the many years we beheld that light in our midst through Fr. Jack, a just man like no other.

We gazed at the shining light of his zeal for the apostolate, most especially as Fr. Jack practiced his sociological craft. Much has already been said in tribute to how he applied his brilliant sociological mind to the problems of Philippine society. His research and writing will always be there, to be pored over and studied and appreciated by grateful generations to come. But what bears mentioning now is how his dedication to the sociological discipline was itself a shining witness of light. Countless students and academic advisees, research partners and colleagues in the social sciences, and an appreciative public that has valued and respected his ideas will surely attest to this.

And perhaps, in a most privileged manner, those of us who have worked for what is now known as the John J. Carroll Institute on Church and Social Issues beheld the light of his zeal shining most brightly, at times even glaringly. There were the strict work hours. The fear and trembling as we awaited comments from him for written work submitted for his approval. His disdain for what he would call the "plotting and scheming" that would distract from more important tasks in the office. His wagging finger and sarcastic smile whenever work was not up to his standards—or as his prodigal editor and eventual Jesuit convert Nono Alfonso would say, "*ngiting aso*." His insistence on spartan work conditions—no aircon in the ICSI offices before 1 pm (and no aircon at all in his office), not only to reduce the electric bill, but because Fr. Jack insisted that the poor visiting us should see us united in their plight even in the smallest of ways. This was very meaningful, but as you can imagine it also made work in the ICSI office uncomfortable at times. All this was a challenge for those working with him, but the burden was borne gladly because it represented who Fr. Jack was and what he was committed to. And in the end we realized, sometimes grudgingly, that we have become better persons because of it. Fr. Jack's light burns on in the hearts of many whom we he guided and inspired.

Second, we recall how the people Fr. Jack guided and inspired were individuals he cared for and loved deeply. In this he follows once again the example of his Lord and Master. The gospel

shows us how Jesus loved real, concrete friends, a love that led him to grieve the death of Lazarus, a love that inspired Martha's profession of faith, a love that prompted the greatest of Jesus' miracles. One can almost say that Jesus was most powerful when he was most compassionate for the other.

In an analogous way, Fr. Jack took great pride and joy in the accomplishments of others. I have had the good fortune of living with him during practically every stage of Jesuit formation after novitiate and most of my years as a priest, as well as working with him at ICSI since regency. In all our countless conversations through the years I can safely say he was most animated and alive when talking not about his own impressive achievements, but the achievements of his friends.

He would tirelessly recount, for example, how Fr. Joel Tabora and Marlene Gatpatan slew the dragons in Congress to pass the Urban Development and Housing Act. He would beam with pride at the research progress of Dona Sermeno-Flynn and Ciely Goño on rural development, the advocacy advances of Jigger Latoza and Jere Opiniano among migrants, the important interventions of Sandra Yu and Reggie Indon in the informal sector. He would happily report how Liza Lim and her team at the Institute of Social Order were continuing the good work begun by his hero, Fr. Walter Hogan. He was especially concerned that Ching Ignacio and Manay Llana would not only continue their work with impoverished children, but that they would also take time out to attend to their own growing families. In more hushed tones he would quietly brag about how the Jesuits he mentored had gone on to make their mark in different fields: Bobby Yap and Jojo Magadia in important leadership positions in our Universities and the Province, Junjun Borres at the helm of the campaign against the death penalty, Pedro Walpole in his important work for the environment, Ritchie Genilo at the center of the dialogue on reproductive health issues, and yes, Nono Alfonso as Dr. Love on DZMM Teleradyo. Perhaps most proudly he would speak of how the Institute on Church and Social Issues, which he founded in 1984 with Fr. Ben Nebres and Bishop Cisco Claver, was now led by talented lay people, with Jing Karaos—who had worked closest and longest with Fr. Jack—taking over as executive director in 2000, and Gemma Marin in 2009. Surely there are many other names to be mentioned and I apologize for missing out on them, but in the triumphs of these and many other friends, Fr. Jack found true joy and fulfillment.

Finally, we recall how Fr. Jack was a shepherd in the truest sense of the word, faithful as priest and Jesuit, his soul at rest in the Lord his shepherd as Psalm 23 reminds us. He was a shepherd who found both rest and strength in prayer. One enduring image I have of Fr. Jack is him at five in the morning, coffee mug in hand, sitting in familiar but fervent prayer in front of the image of Our Lady of the Poor at the garden of the old Arvisu House along Katipunan avenue (this statue is now at the doorway of De La Costa House, the Province Curia in Varsity Hills). Those who have worked with Fr. Jack would have experienced dropping by his office, and catching him reading his breviary, sanctifying his busy day with prayer. And somehow, in the midst of his tight schedule, he would be able to find time to share the riches of his spiritual life to others, directing individual retreatants, guiding spiritual directees, leading prayer groups.

He was a shepherd who, as Pope Francis says, smelled of his sheep. His research and advocacy in behalf of the impoverished found its wellsprings in his pastoral work among the poor, especially in Payatas. It was a work that later inspired him to set up, with the help of his trusted collaborators Ate Malu, Aling Celing, Gina, Jingle, and many others, the scholarship and feeding programs, as well as Natural Family Planning training teams. *Sa mga tiga-Payatas, sa mga*

*scholar, mga katuwang niya sa NFP at iba pang mga programa, siguradong alam ninyo na mahal na mahal kayo ni Fr. Jack. Kayo ang nagpasigla at nagbigay buhay sa kaniyang mga gawain, kayo ang pinagmulan ng kaniyang pinakamarubdob na pagmamalasakit at pinakamalalim na kaligayahan.*

He was a shepherd among us Jesuits, truly edifying and inspiring in his faithfulness to the vows. When I learned from the Provincial that I was to be missioned to Timor Leste, and would be given a little over a year to wrap up my work in the social apostolate, one of the first persons I approached with the news was Fr. Jack. I entered his infirmary room with a bit of apprehension. When I had to inform him a number of times before that I could not give as much time as I wanted to ICSI because of other responsibilities—various kinds of formation work, demands from the University, leadership of the Society of Jesus Social Apostolate Network—Fr. Jack basically reprimanded me. In so many words he would tell me to grow a spine and confront the Provincial, and to be more protective of my time and commitments in ICSI. But when I told Fr. Jack of my new foreign mission he gently told me that “If East Timor is where you can do more good, then that is where you should go.” I was stunned at first but then deeply moved when I remembered that he himself was a missionary and understood full well the missionary impulse at the heart of our Jesuit vocation. I entered his room seeking approval, and left instead with his benediction: one shepherd sending another to tend the flock.

Light, friend, shepherd. Please allow me one last recollection to bring all these reflections together. It is a happy Christmas memory from nearly twenty years ago. In 1995 three of us scholastics—Cesar Marin and Salty de la Rama doing theology studies, and I as a regent at ICSI—are living with Fr. Jack and the prenovices in the old Arvisu House. For Christmas Eve Fr. Jack suggests that rather than going to the LHS *noche buena* after Christmas ministry, we stay at Arvisu to be with the few prenovices who were unable to go home for the holidays. All three of us had family in the Manila area and we could have easily excused ourselves, but because this was Fr. Jack we gladly accede to the request. Fr. Jack and I head off for masses in Payatas, and Salty and Cesar to San Jose Manggagawa in Marikina. Fr. Jack is especially happy because he had spent Christmas eve with the people in Payatas he had cared for so deeply. Returning home to Arvisu we gather together for *noche buena*. There are many stories and much good cheer to go around. Sometime after midnight Fr. Jack excuses himself, saying he has to turn in because he has to work at the office the following day. Yes, on Christmas day! Salty, Cesar, and I linger on, then Cesar gets the brilliant idea that we should take all the bananas from the Christmas mass offerings, the *alay sa misa*, and surprise Fr. Jack with banana pancakes for breakfast, one of the rare treats he indulged in. He had developed a taste for these, if I am not mistaken, during Wednesday breakfasts after mass with the Cenacle sisters. Over more cheerful banter Salty and I are busy peeling bananas and Cesar mixes the batter, although by about two in the morning when we finally retire the fruit of our labors is closer to *maruya* than to banana pancakes.

This memory never fails to warm my heart for it encapsulates for me all that Fr. Jack stood for. His dedication to the poor. His steadfast commitment to work. His humility and simplicity. His enjoyment of the company of his Jesuit brethren. His ability to inspire loyalty, and to bring people together: those three scholastics all those years ago, and now all of us at his death. His powerful presence will always be with us, sometimes to chastise, more often to inspire and encourage, but always, always entreating as a father.

We started these reflections with the song “Danny Boy,” and so allow me to end with “The Irish Blessing,” another favorite of Fr. Jack’s. Fr. Jack, forgive me for paraphrasing the blessing a bit and inculturating it in the context of the country you have served so well. It goes:

“With the dusty roads of our barrios rising up to meet you,  
The hot blast of our cities behind your back,  
The storms refreshing and inundating our parched lands,  
May you behold the gentle smiles of our people radiant as sunshine.  
And until we meet again,  
May God hold you in the palm of his hand.”

Fr. Jack, our light, our friend, our shepherd, faithful father and gracious guardian of our souls, may God now hold you in the palm of His hand.