

Remembering John Rick Miller and the Mission he founded

By Father Corey Campeaux

Many of us remember the changes that took place in each of us and in the Mission when our beloved founder John Rick Miller was diagnosed with cancer. At the very news of his illness, some abandoned the Mission. Others stayed. We all struggled. Many wondered what would the Mission look like going forward? Let us consider some things about our beloved founder as we, together with Christ, continue moving forward.

For those of us who knew John Rick Miller, listened to his talks, or met him through the memories of others, know what a gift he was. Who could explain the power of his voice? John himself could not. What about the ability John Rick had to speak to members at the highest levels of government, or the seemingly miraculous results of these meetings? No one can explain these things because these things are gifts from God which he distributed through a man. This is the way of God. He sends messengers and blesses us through them. It was not Rick's idea to do the things he did. At the very beginning it took the faithful insistence of his wife to receive Our Lady. Later, it took the stern faith of a stranger, in order to get him to journey to Colombia, where the Mission began. The Mission was not Rick's plan. The Mission was God's plan which Rick had to slowly understand and accept.

Sometimes I think we put too much attention to the grand accomplishments of Rick and forget that he did these things by saying yes to God. I am sure it was not always easy for Rick even if it appeared so to us. It is easy to consider someone's trials easy when we do not know their interior. For example, Mother Teresa experienced significant interior trials without anyone noticing. When we looked at her, we only saw her grand accomplishments, not her interior struggle or even the failures she experienced. When we consider only grand accomplishments, we are frustrated in our efforts in the Mission. We expect our efforts to produce the same effects that we think John's efforts did, and we are frustrated when things do not work out this way. On the surface it seems that we pay homage to Rick or the Mission to expect grand accomplishment, but underneath the surface of our actions there is the temptation to cling to the idea of a glamorous Christianity. This is not unheard of. The apostles vied for positions of grandeur in the kingdom of God, however, the glamorous places they imagined were not what they expected. To sit at the right and left hand of Jesus meant dying the shameful death of a condemned criminal next to Jesus on the Cross. It is difficult to imagine, but these were the places prepared by the Father. In other words, these condemned men were given a gift to suffer with Jesus.

Being a Christian is not about glamour. If we think being a Christian or working in the Mission is glamorous, we should consider how much Rick suffered. We do not know what he felt interiorly through his trials or even his successes. Through our faith, we may infer that God gave Rick sufferings in

order to purify him. Rick suffered the humiliations of asking for “impossible” things. Think of it this way. Was it easy for Noah to build an ark in the middle of a dry area? What about Moses? Was it easy to return to Egypt (where he was wanted for murder) and demand that Pharaoh release God’s people? Neither was it easy for Rick, nor is it easy for us. The glory of God is not that we go through life without faults. The glory of God is that His grace in us triumphs over our faults to make something truly beautiful. It is hard for us to conceive that God wants to use our faults as a means of purifying us and accomplishing His Will. To consider this requires faith. As a man, Rick was subject to the same trials and tribulations each of us must endure. He may have suffered more because he had such a public role.

Jesus suffered much and endured many trials. Rick also suffered, and so shall we. Since Jesus is the way to salvation, salvation means enduring the cross. What should we do about this? We should remember something Rick often counseled us to do. He counseled us to say, “Yes, Lord.”

“The Mission” is for the Love of God. We receive the Mission from God. At the same time, God does not will to accomplish His Mission without our help. He could do so, but He chooses to utilize us. We do not deserve it; it is His mercy. In His love for us, God desires that we each have a share in His Mission. It is perhaps for this reason that he allows us to retain some of our faults so that we may overcome them in serving God. In the measure that we do so, we share in the glory of God. God loves those who consider themselves poor and lowly because he uses individual lowly persons to accomplish great things they did not themselves set out to do.

We need to be not afraid of small efforts, small prayer groups, small accomplishments. These God loves most because it makes clear whose glory is being made evident. Consider how Mary is the greatest of all the saints and yet she did not consider herself Great. She considered only that God is great. When does God choose those who are proud and consider themselves great? Does he not rather “put down the mighty from their thrones, and [exalt] those of low degree” (Lk 1:52)? God chooses those who consider themselves poor and sends them to speak to the mighty. For example, St. Juan Diego was a poor and humble man and yet God sent him to Bishop Zumarraga to accomplish the conversion of Mexico. St. Paul God chose for ministry, but found it necessary to humble his pride. At Paul’s conversion he was literally thrown down by the might of God. Throughout his ministry he was continually humbled so that he learned not to trust in his own might, but in God (cf. 1 Cor 2:1-5). This was God’s plan for Paul and it confirmed in him the wisdom of God. May he help us also to receive this wisdom.

In the gospel of Mark (9:30-31) Jesus describes to the Apostles that the Son of Man will be delivered into the hands of men who will kill him. The gospel also records that “[the disciples] did not understand the saying, and they were afraid to ask him” (Mk 9:32). The truth Jesus was presenting did not enter their hearts for them to ponder as Mary did (cf. Lk 2:19). They simply did not understand. I imagine they felt

it cost too much for them to consider such a proposition. This is not unlike our own experience. Often, we wait for the powerful to make changes or attempt to grasp power for ourselves in order to change things to our liking, but this is incompatible with Christianity. Jesus did not act this way. "He did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself taking the form of a [slave]" (Philippians 2:6b-7). Following the prediction of the passion in Mark's gospel just quoted, the apostles argue among themselves about who is the greatest among them. They are reduced to silence when Jesus asks them about what they are discussing. In other words, their love for Jesus and their understanding of Him in faith was limited.

In the end, it is God and not man who judges our actions. In the end, it is not men who accomplish great things, but God who accomplishes great things in little men. Who are we to say that our "small accomplishments" are not greatly loved by God. What is necessary is not for us to do big things. What is necessary is for us to say, as Rick did, "Yes, Lord." "Yes, Father." It is up to God to do the rest (purify our souls, accomplish our salvation and the salvation of the world). Our yes to all acts little or small is not optional. It is necessary. If we wish to continue the work of the Mission for the Love of God Worldwide, let us learn to say "Yes!" to God in little things, great things, in-between things, even humiliating things, but always with great love.