

Homily for the Funeral Mass of Father Joseph Scanlin

July 17, 2026 • Assumption BVM Church
Reverend Robert Gillelan, Homilist

The Venerable Madeleine Delbrêl was a French Catholic laywoman, mystic, and writer. She once wrote:

“Life has the job of preparing us for death, and it knows its job well. We only have to listen to life, watch it well, and follow it. It explains death to us little by little, or in one fell swoop, depending on the day. Sometimes without doing us any harm at all, and at other times by tearing us apart with grief. Sometimes by underlining the small deaths that we endure each day, and at other times by laying out in death those whom we love more than our own selves.”

And so, if life has the job of preparing us for death, it is our faith that prepares us for resurrection and eternal life. For Father Joe, that life of faith began in Baptism. So it is that we began Father Joe’s Funeral Mass with

the Rite of Sprinkling with Holy Water to recall his Baptism and to remind us of what happens in Baptism. In the waters of Baptism, Joseph died with Christ and rose with Him to new life. May he now share with Him eternal glory.

This is why, for us Catholics, a funeral is not just a celebration of life. It is a celebration of a life in Christ and a profound expression of our faith—faith in the Resurrection. Our trust is that what God did for Jesus, raising Him from the dead, He will do for Joseph and for all the baptized. Resurrection is the cornerstone of our faith. Saint Paul reminds us: “If Jesus has not been raised from the dead, then your faith is in vain.”

So we come here today as a people to give expression to our faith and hope—a people who live in the sure and certain hope that one day we will see Father Joe again and enjoy his friendship.

As the Dominican priest Father William Bonniwell once wrote:

“When the battle of life finally draws to a close, our Father, whom we have never seen,

will send for us to come. He called for us to come home—the home we have never known. And in that new life, our soul will one day be reunited to the body. Not the feeble, imperfect body we have here on earth, but a glorified body like the risen Christ—a body incapable of sorrow, temptation, or any kind of suffering. For all these former things will have passed away. And when we arrive at our Father’s house, it will not be as a stranger. Waiting for us will be the members of our family and our friends who were taken from us in death. How wonderful will that reunion be with those who were dearest and closest to us on earth—a reunion never again to be broken.”

For Father Joe, even though retirement was painfully short, now enjoys reunion with his beloved family members and friends who have gone before him, marked with the sign of faith— will be gloriously never-ending.

Faith, hope and love.

Saint Paul says that the greatest of these is love. Love is the one thing that not even death can destroy. The bonds of love that are forged in this life do not unravel in death. Those bonds of love forged between Jesus and Father Joe and the faithful of our diocese were so beautifully manifest in his priesthood.

Saint John Vianney said:

“The priesthood is the love of the Heart of Jesus.”

That love was manifest in Father Joe’s priesthood for thirty-seven years, serving as pastor in the Queen of the Holy Rosary Parish, Elysburg, and Saint Cecilia Parish here in Lebanon.

That love was beautifully manifest as a parochial vicar in Saint Joseph Parish, Hanover; Saint Patrick Parish, York; and Saint Patrick Parish, Carlisle. That love was beautifully manifest as he served as chaplain to Dickinson College and their law school. And we here at Saint Mary’s are so thankful for his loving service to our parish as Director of Religious Education before he entered the seminary.

For over three decades, Father Joe's priestly ministry was shaped by our Lord's command at the Last Supper to lovingly serve one another.

That loving service by Father Joe was so beautifully manifest in his unwavering devotion to his Catholic faith and to his family. Those two foundations guided every aspect of his life at every parish he was privileged to serve. He embraced each parish community as an extension of his own family. In return the people he served welcomed him with affection and love. His kindness, compassion, steady presence—even in the midst of his own physical struggles and sufferings—touched countless lives and created lasting bonds that will extend well beyond the walls of the Church.

Faith , hope, love and thanksgiving. Do we not come here this morning to give thanks to God for the gift of Father Joe's life? A life that reflected a gentle spirit, faithful priestly service, a genuine concern for others, and that wonderful sense of humor which apparently he started cultivating at an early age.

Aggie tells the story of Joe as a child trying to make his sisters laugh as the family prayed the Rosary. And to know Joe is to say, “Yeah, that sounds about right.”

So while there is sadness in parting, our gratitude for the gift of his life helps us. It consoles us. Father Joe leaves behind a beautiful legacy of faith, compassion, and selfless ministry that will continue to inspire those who are blessed to know him. He will be deeply missed by his family, parishioners, friends, and the many communities fortunate enough to have shared in his life and ministry.

And so it is that, with sadness, but in faith, hope, love, and thanksgiving, we open our arms and our hearts and allow Father Joe to go home, to be with the God who loved him first and foremost and has now called him home to Himself.

Father Joe, having done the work of an evangelist, remembering the exhortation of Archbishop Keeler on the day of our ordination, “May you hear the invitation of our Lord.”

Joseph, you have fought the good fight. You have finished the race. You have kept the faith and proclaimed it. Now enter into your heavenly reward.