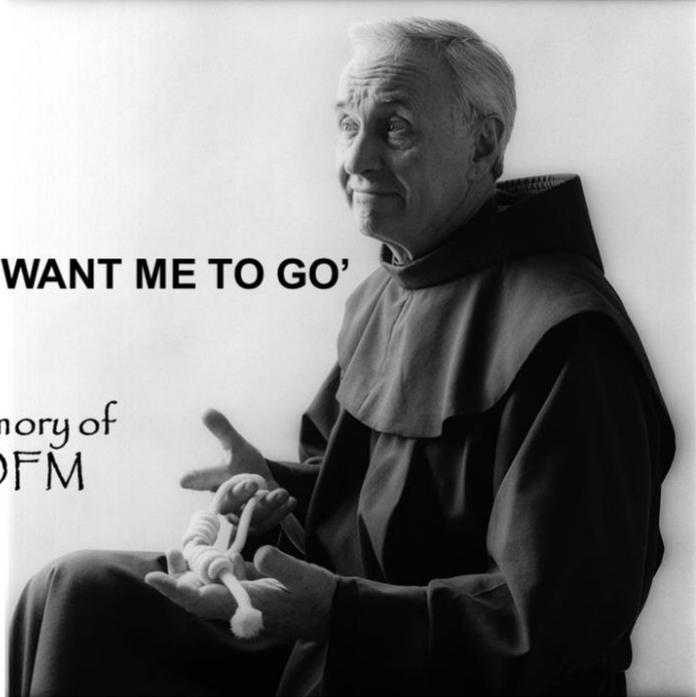


## **'TAKE ME WHERE YOU WANT ME TO GO'**

A Prayer Service in Memory of  
Fr. Mychal Judge, OFM



*Prepared by New Ways Ministry*

### **Opening Prayer**

In the course of his life, Father Mychal Judge's simple prayer was, "*Lord, take me where you want me to go. Let me meet who you want me to meet. Tell me what you want me to say, and keep me out of your way.*" In these uncomplicated words, Father Judge exemplified his deep, personal relationship with God and God's people. As we bless our gay saint this evening and honor his legacy, let us also acknowledge our own calling, and trust in where God wants us to go.

### **Opening Song**

### **Readings**

The readings for this prayer service are taken from Liturgical Press' biography of our saint entitled *Fr. Mychal Judge: Take Me Where You Want Me to Go*, by Francis DeBernardo, executive director of New Ways Ministry.

The readings reflect on four aspects of Fr. Judge's spirituality that taught him to recognize the presence of God: his Franciscan spirit, his involvement with Alcoholics Anonymous, his gay sexuality, and his ministry with firefighters. The closing reading reflects on his life's meaning for us today.

After each reading, there is a short responsory prayer.

## Reading 1 & Response: Fr. Judge's Franciscan Spirit (pp. 22-24)

**Reader 1:** Michael's pastoral ministry style sprung not only from his personality and social talent but from the Franciscan spirituality that shaped his understanding of God. Primary among these Franciscan spiritual values is a deep reverence for the incarnation of Christ. St. Francis was so taken with the idea that God took on human flesh, became human, and entered history that he wanted people to have a strong visual reminder of the event. He is credited with having started the now universal tradition of erecting a nativity scene at Christmas time.

But in Franciscan thought, the incarnation was more than just something that happened once in Bethlehem over two thousand years ago. For the poor man from Assisi and his followers through the centuries, all of creation was a reflection of God's glory. Nothing earthly is foreign to God. All is essentially good. The incarnation is a way of looking at and receiving the world and its people.

Though many have tamed this Franciscan value into sentimental thoughts about the beauty of nature, the emphasis on the immanence of God in the world became a grounding principle for how the friars ministered.

His friend Brian Carroll, who had been a friar, recalled that Michael "fell in love with St. Francis."<sup>14</sup> As a priest, Michael took it upon himself to point out the fusion of the divine and the human in each individual life. God was not distant but was down in the dirt. God was not something to be achieved, but was already active in people's lives, actions, and relationships. For Michael, being a pastoral minister meant seeing God acting in every person's life. He had a keen sense of the connection between the secular and the sacred, the divine and the human, the mundane and the supernatural. With St. Francis as his model, Michael saw God and goodness everywhere and in everyone, no matter how small or outcast.

He told a local newspaper reporter in 1978, "God is here, right here, alive and with us. God is so tremendously great to me. If he weren't, I couldn't do the things I do. And every time I do something for him, he does so much more for me. Every person has the responsibility to talk about God. When we speak of God, we bring a sense of God, even for a moment, into the world. At the same time, we develop a sense of God in our own lives. God is not an obligation, a burden. God is the joy of my life."

One way his incarnational spirit manifested itself was through Michael's practice of blessing . . . nearly everything. Because everything to him was sacred and should be recognized as such, his blessings were ubiquitous. He blessed pregnant women, sick people, marriages, animals, mealtimes, recreational times. Blessings were not simply spiritual gestures but physical ones, in which he laid hands on a person, hugged them, looked deep in their eyes, made personal contact. His blessings didn't so much evoke a

supernatural force as much as recognize and affirm the presence of the divine already working in a person's body, relationships, and event.

## **Responsory**

**Leader:** All of creation is a reflection of your glory, O God -

**All:** How majestic is your name in all the earth

**Leader:** When we behold your heavens, the work of your hands, the moon and the stars which you have set in place -

**All:** Who are we that you should be so mindful of us?

**Leader:** You have made all humanity, including your LGBTQ and ally community, barely less than You, O God

**All:** And blessed us with glory and honor, no matter how small or outcast. Amen.

## Reading 2 & Response: Fr. Judge's Involvement with Alcoholics Anonymous (pp. 40-42)

**Reader 2:** While Alcoholics Anonymous introduced Judge to a new form of spirituality, this new program did not replace the Franciscan charism of his religious formation. Judge remained very much a Franciscan, even while he added the new layer of AA spirituality to his life. It was congruent with Franciscan ideals, and perhaps there was no stronger connection between the two than the Franciscan emphasis on Christ's passion, which would have been a strong part of Judge's early formation.

St. Francis saw the cross, with all its pain, suffering, sacrifice, humiliation, and rejection as something to be embraced. It was not to be feared or avoided but welcomed as an authentic way to God and as the most compelling evidence of God's love for humanity. Christ's crucifixion was so essential to St. Francis's understanding of God's love that he became the first recorded person in history to receive the stigmata, the five wounds of Christ, on his own body. The saint embraced this suffering as a great joy.

Similarly, AA emphasized that one should not hide or reject the parts of one's life where pain and suffering existed. Denial is the great enemy of recovery. Denying that one is an alcoholic provides one of the greatest encouragements for the alcoholic to keep on drinking as if nothing were wrong. It's no accident that the main verb of Step 1 is an *admission*.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, denying the existence of pain and suffering in one's life only contributes to continuing to seek alcohol as a way of numbing these feelings. Instead of denying pain and suffering, AA encourages people to admit it.

Father Richard Rohr, OFM, writes that this embrace of the passion is the "unique Franciscan view of the world."<sup>12</sup> Rohr acknowledges that one of the clearest examples of accepting and embracing suffering in the modern world is the 12-Step movement. Indeed, those who have come to terms with their suffering are the ones who become true leaders: "What the crucified has revealed to the world is that the real authority that 'authors' people and changes the world is an inner authority that comes from people who have lost, let go, and are refound on a new level."<sup>13</sup> This passage, a reflection on Franciscan thought, strongly echoes the journey of many 12-Step members: recognizing one has "lost" the struggle by hitting rock bottom, recognizing one's powerlessness, and letting go by handing over control to God, freeing oneself from past mistakes, and achieving a "refound" identity, a more authentic self.

AA gave Judge a new insight into ministry too. The fellowship of AA allowed him to help others but also provided a reciprocal opportunity for him to be ministered to as well. In AA, no person is an ultimate leader or authority. Every person challenges and supports others while at the same time being challenged and supported. Judge thrived in this environment and would carry this dimension of sharing both his brokenness and

his gifts into the new ministry opportunities that awaited him. Throughout the remainder of his life, Judge would continue to be a faithful AA member, attending meetings regularly, especially when feeling particularly stressed, and also making himself available for conversation and support to other AA members in between meetings.

Carroll saw that Judge's recovery and acceptance of his whole self-made him a more effective minister and church leader. "He was St. Francis on steroids," Carroll observed. "In ministry he emphasized the importance of being yourself, of welcoming others, of being non-judgmental, of accepting people where they were, and always being humble." Judge's own struggle helped him "to look into people's hearts and to see the goodness and humanity there."

## **Responsory**

**Leader:** I cried to you for help, my God -

**All:** And you healed me

**Leader:** Where pain and suffering existed, you turned my mourning into dancing -

**All:** You stripped me of my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness

**Leader:** Let my heart sing your praises and not be silent -

**All:** You are my God, and I will thank you forever! Amen.

### Reading 3 & Response: Fr. Judge's Gay Identity (pp. 122-123)

**Reader 3:** In 1999, two years before Judge's death, a gay friend had encouraged Judge to keep a journal in which he could write about his sexual identity openly. The journal was a short-lived exercise, extending only a few months and extending through fifty-seven pages. Friends said Judge never had time to write because of his busy schedule. Judge's twin sister, Dympna, gave journalist Michael Daly access to the journal, and he included some excerpts in his 2008 biography of Judge.

As noted previously, Judge began the diary with some self-identification on the inside front cover: "Some Mother's Son. 230 Dean St. [his boyhood address] Irish, Catholic, Democrat, priest, gay and more . . . No one (ever) asked me!"<sup>11</sup>

The entries that followed chronicle his struggle with being private about his sexuality. Part of this struggle was due to the fact that he genuinely accepted the gift of sexuality and his own sexuality in particular. He wanted the freedom to share that reality with others: "I thought of my gay self and how the people I meet never get to know me fully—and why? Because it is not acceptable. No one, absolutely no one lives two fuller separate lives as I do. Little wonder I am so tired at day's end."

Judge had learned to appreciate his sexual feelings and was grateful to God for them, even though he was aware that the church often sent disapproving messages about sexual attractions:

A thousand thoughts and desires run through my mind at everybody I see. But only for a moment—Drives, desires, passions, energy, excitement, yearning and all the rest. I see the beauty, how God created it and how, in a sense, the Church scorns your dwelling on it—Sexual, sinful—Hand in hand—But they are not connected at all. I love, I applaud the beauty of God's handiwork. . . . Sexually, I am alive as I can be. The thoughts, the drives, the desire are there always. Can't see enough on the street . . . and I am grateful for it . . . And you, Lord, are always there and you so nicely remind me to call on you and show me your presence. I love you. . . . Well, here I am . . . I'm somehow started, I think, on this new journey—not sure where it is taking me, how I am to go, etc. etc. But I keep praying and asking for guidance and leadership. It is a real test of my faith and belief and that God is there.<sup>13</sup>

These and other passages in the Judge diary reveal that, despite the struggles, he had come to a healthy and holy acceptance of his sexuality and its place in his life as a committed Franciscan friar. Like any partial record, these brief writings make some readers wish for fuller explanations. How did he come to such an acceptance of his identity? If his experience were typical, this process would have included many moments of confusion, guilt, shame, despair, constraint, and even doubts about a loving

God. But it also would have included many powerful moments of clarity, affirmation, joy, courage, liberation, and faith in a God of love who made human creatures with the capacity for love. From the bits of information that he left about his self-acceptance and communing with God, these latter moments were surely in abundance.

## **Responsory**

**Leader:** Creator God, you designed my innermost being -

**All:** And stitched me together in my mother's womb

**Leader:** For all these mysteries, I thank you -

**All:** For the wonder of myself, my identity and sexuality, and for the wonder of Your works - my soul knows it well.

**Leader:** I embrace my whole self, created in your likeness, O God -

**All:** In true righteousness and holiness. Amen.

## Reading 4 & Response: Fr. Judge's Ministry to Firefighters (pp. 72-73)

**Reader 4:** Firefighters' near-constant awareness of life and death often inspires them to ask the big, ultimate questions about existence and eternity more than other people do. Firefighters always put others' lives and safety before their own. They trust and rely on one another as deeply as police officers and military personnel do. And because they are ready for this life of service every day, this faith in each other becomes background for them, something not necessary to talk about, but simply to live. Though firefighters may be the last to admit it, firefighting has a sacred dimension to it.

"Firefighters ask me to bless them, but I feel blessed by them," Judge would say.<sup>12</sup> Far from being a ministerial cliché, this sentiment expressed the fact that as he lived among the firefighters, Judge was experiencing a new kind of spirituality that was more based in actions than ideas or words. On one occasion, he told the firefighters, "The firehouse is a holy place. It will always be holy ground for you."<sup>13</sup>

On September 10, 2001, Mychal Judge preached at a Mass celebrating the rededication of a newly renovated Bronx firehouse. In what would be his last sermon, he looked toward the future, whatever it would hold:

We come to this house this morning to celebrate renewal, rejuvenation, new life. We come to thank God for the blessings for all the years that the good work has been done here. . . . We can never thank God enough for the reality of the lives we have. So standing in his presence this morning—and truly this is a chapel—let us pause for a moment, perhaps close our eyes and thank God for some special blessing in our individual lives. You do what God has called you to do . . . you go out to do the job which is a mystery and a surprise . . . No matter how big the call, no matter how small, you have no idea what God's calling you to but he needs you. He needs me. He needs all of us. . . . Work together . . . and from this house, God's blessings go forth to this community. It's fantastic but very painful. We love the job. We all do. What a blessing that is—a difficult, difficult job, and God calls you to it and indeed he gives you a love for it so that a difficult job will be well done. Isn't he a wonderful guy? Isn't he good to you, to each one of you, and to me? Turn to him each day, put your faith and your trust and your hope and your life in his hands. And he'll take care of you. And you'll have a good life.

Judge concluded the Mass by leading the congregation in singing "God Bless America." Without knowing the tragedy that the next day held, Mychal Judge was ready for it.

## **Responsory**

**Leader:** Let our LGBTQ and ally light shine before others, O God -

**All:** That all might see our good deeds and glorify you, YHWH, in heaven.

**Leader:** For even the Promised One came not to be served -

**All:** But to serve and give one's life as a ransom for many.

**Leader:** You make known to me the path of life

**All:** And fill me with joy in your presence, O God. By your side I am blessed with everlasting happiness. Amen.

## Litany of LGBTQ+ Saints

Leader: Our response at the end of each prayer is “pray for us.”

**Reader 1:** Gracious God, we thank you for the lives of our LGBTQ saints and martyrs. May they inspire us to live with courage and loving hearts.

1. Saint Mychal Judge, fire-brigade chaplain and first martyr of 9/11, recognized for your queer spirit, pray for us
2. Saints of Stonewall, who performed the miracle of transforming self-hatred into pride, pray for us.
3. Saint Joan of Arc, fearless warrior and gender-queer martyr, pray for us.
4. Saint Sergius and Saint Bacchus, male couple united in love and death, pray for us.
5. Saint Perpetua and Saint Felicity, who shared a holy kiss before dying, patron saints of same-sex couples, pray for us.
6. Saint Brigid and Saint Darlughdach, women soulmates whose lives together were aflame with the Holy Spirit, pray for us.
7. Saint John, Beloved Disciple, apostle and evangelist who lay on Jesus’ chest at the last supper, pray for us.
8. Saint Francis of Assisi, gender nonconformist who loved all creation without limits, pray for us.
9. Saint Desmond Tutu, South Africa’s strong LGBTQ ally who taught that racism and homophobia are connected, pray for us.
10. Saint Alan Turing, who ended war, saved millions and changed the world, pray for us.
11. Dame Julian of Norwich, who celebrated “Mother Jesus,” pray for us.
12. Saint David Kato, Ugandan activist and resilient martyr, pray for us.
13. Saint Marsha P. Johnson, Stonewall instigator, and revolutionary black trans activist, pray for us.
14. Saints Jonathan and David, Saints Ruth and Naomi, Biblical images of same-gender love, pray for us



*Marsha P. Johnson*



*Matthew Shepard*

15. Saint Harvey Milk, martyred gay rights pioneer, pray for us.
16. Saint Matthew Shepard, crucified by hate-filled men, young forever, pray for us.
17. 49 Martyrs of Pulse Nightclub, Orlando, shielding those you loved with your own bodies, pray for us,
18. Martyrs of the UpStairs Lounge fire, whose memory burns in our hearts, pray for us.
19. All who have lived and died for love, peace and justice, pray for us.
20. Jesus, friend and liberator of outcasts, tortured and killed on the cross for loving beyond limits, pray for us.

*Adapted from Litany of Queer Saints by Kittredge Cherry | Q Spirit*

## **Our Father/Mother**

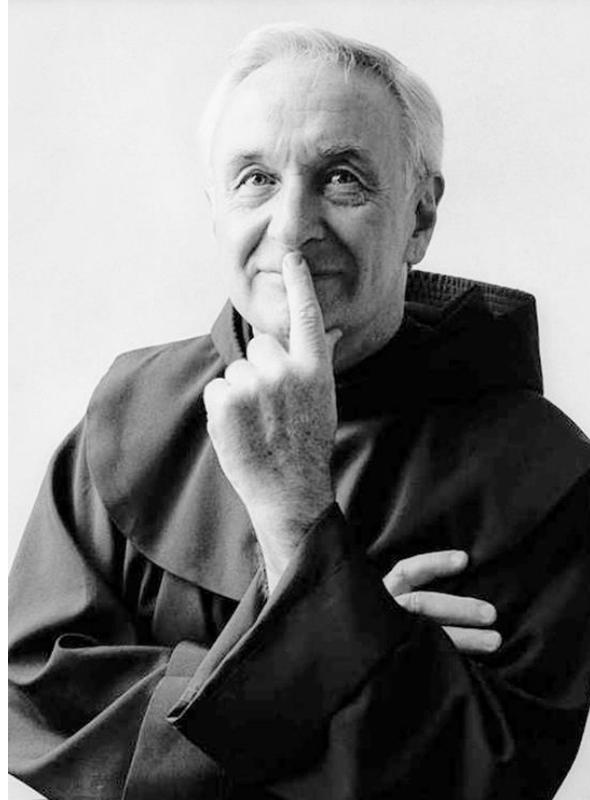
Gathering our prayers and petitions let us pray in the words Jesus taught us.

## Closing Reading

When we talk of the firefighters, police officers, and emergency medical technicians that risked, and often gave, their lives to help others on 9/11, we call them first responders. That title very accurately describes Father Mychal Judge, not just on that fateful day, but throughout his life and his various ministries. Mychal Judge learned how to respond to God's call, however and whenever it came

In a sense, Fr. Judge had prepared for that day all his life by learning to trust God, to be grateful to God, and to follow God's lead.

Let us end with a prayer, Mychal's prayer, the only written prayer that we know he composed and gave to others to say. When God would put opportunities in Mychal Judge's way, he did not say to God, as I know I often do, "I would, but. . . ." Instead he answered with his prayer, filled with both faith and his own self-deprecating humor. Let us all recite it together:



**“Lord, take me where you want me to go. Let me meet who you want me to meet. Tell me what you want me to say, and keep me out of your way.”**

## Closing Song