

**My Beloved Family, Dear Friends of Robert and Kelly, Church Family of St. Mary's,**

**With all my heart, I believe as he left us, Robert heard this beautiful, irresistible invitation, "Come to me, you who have labored and are burdened, and I will give you rest."**

**St. Paul tells us today, "Our citizenship is in heaven..." So, we come together this afternoon, not to mourn Robert's leaving us, but rather to celebrate his going home.**

**Every now and then, it seems to me, that God sends a person into this life who is too good for this world. Such a person was Robert. As I reflected on many conversations I had with Robert over the years, there was one, constant refrain. He would squeeze up his face, like he did, and say, "Uncle Vic, I just don't get it."**

**As a child, when he experienced a mean-spirited person or selfishness or anger or hatefulness, he would say to me, "Uncle Vic, I just don't get it,"**

**As a teen, mocked, teased, and bullied because of his gentle, warm, caring way, he would say, "Uncle, I don't get it."**

**In his later teens, feeling rejected and frightened by a world filled with so much hurt and anger and evil, Robert turned in on himself and retreated from the world. You see he really had become a truly innocent young man confronted by a hard, cruel, mean world, and with the purest of hearts, he could only say, "Uncle, I just don't get it."**

**He tried again and again to fit in but could find no acceptance, no understanding, no appreciation. George and Louise, fearful for him asked him to go to a program to build up his self-esteem. The problem, of course, was not so much his low opinion of himself, it was that his sweet innocence couldn't abide the world in which he found himself.**

**While in the program, he met a kindred spirit, a young woman who was also struggling. As I've told you many times, Kelly, I believe that God sent you to Robert to protect him and save him from the fears and the pain that threatened to destroy him. With him you formed a bond of love that strengthened and sustained both of you over these many years, as you sought to make your way in a world that was often too cruel, too hurtful, too mean-spirited.**

**Please don't misunderstand me. Robert didn't judge us. In his purity and innocence, he simply would not, could not compromise his principles in a world that demanded compromise. For instance, his decision not to eat meat, wasn't a political act or statement, rather he thought about the pain and suffering that an animal underwent to become a meal for us. And, interiorly, if not externally, he cried because the animal had suffered so horribly just to satisfy our human needs and desires. He didn't preach to us or rail against our meat-eating, he would simply say, as he saw people whom he loved, respected, and appreciated eating the meat, "Uncle, I just don't get it."**

**Similarly, with regard to us church-goers, he appreciated the fact that we would come together to worship and praise the God who is Father of us all and pray in the name of the Lord who suffered and died on the Cross for all of us.**

**But, then, he “just couldn’t get” our leaving church to lie, steal, cheat, and hate all week long, like everybody else. He “just couldn’t get” how we could look down on gay people, ignore or belittle people of color, or treat others as Other because we had different points of view or we worshiped God differently or we spoke different languages. He didn’t understand how we could live so comfortably in our mini-mansions while others were homeless or we could eat so well while others went hungry. Again he would say, “Uncle, I just don’t get it.”**

**All of this, of course, led Robert to have a problem with God Himself. How could a good and loving God allow so much suffering and pain and evil in the world? When he would say, “Uncle, I just don’t get it,” I would have to admit that I don’t always get it either. But, I believe that Robert gets it now. He comprehends this great mystery of God and His merciful love that forgives our compromising, evil ways.**

**All that doesn’t mean that Robert was a scold. His laughter was infectious, contagious. His was a joyous spirit that lifted up all who would enter into his joy. His nieces and nephews are here to attest to that. Robert was a magnet for children. They loved being with him and he with them, I believe, because Robert never lost his child-like spirit. He delighted in being with them, and, perhaps, better than most adults he truly listened to them and cared and wanted to know them and everything about them. And the children loved him for it.**

**In this last year of his life, Robert really was “tried as gold in the furnace”. He suffered the worst kind of indignity that the world could inflict. As sick as he was, every doctor, every test, every scan told him there was nothing wrong with him. He knew he was sick. His body was not responding correctly. We who loved him knew he was sick. But, he suffered the terrible frustration of being told again and again that there was nothing wrong or it was all in his head. Can you imagine how hurtful, how painful that had to be? So, yes, in this “God tried him and found him worthy of himself...and as a sacrificial offering He took him to Himself.”**

**For me, in so many ways, Robert’s brief life with us mirrors that of Christ Himself. He truly did take the Lord’s “yoke” upon himself and he learned from Him. He really was meek and humble of heart.**

**He suffered cruelty and rejection because of his innocence and the purity of his convictions. He spent his days trying to do good for everyone and inflicting evil on no one. He poured out his life in giving to and for others and asked little or nothing in return. He lived a simple lifestyle, unjaded by the American quest for bigger, better, best. He simply loved and wanted to be loved in return, but all too frequently he was rebuffed because “they just didn’t get it”. He lived an uncompromising, principled life in a compromised, unprincipled world, and the world hated him for it.**

**Since he died, there’s been a song in my heart that won’t go away. If I may, I would like to share it with you because it speaks to me of Robert, Calm down! I’m not going to sing it! But, with your kind permission, I would like to paraphrase, Don McLean’s *Vincent*:**

**Starry, starry night, paint your palette blue and grey;**

**Look out on a summer's day with eyes that know the darkness in my soul; Shadows on the hills sketch the trees and daffodils, catch the breeze and the winter chills in colors on the snowy linen land. And now I understand what you tried to say to me.**

**How you suffered for your sanity; how you tried to set them free. They would not listen, they did not know how. Perhaps they'll listen now.**

**Starry, starry night, flaming flowers that brightly blaze, swirling clouds in violet haze reflect in Robert's eyes of china blue, colors changing hue, morning fields of amber grain; weathered faces lined in pain, are soothed beneath the artist's loving hand.**

**And now I understand what you tried to say to me. How you suffered for your sanity; how you tried to set them free. Perhaps they'll listen now.**

**For they could not love you, but still your love was true; and when no hope was left in sight on that starry starry night, you surrendered your life as lovers often do; but I could have told you, Robert, this world was never meant for one as beautiful as you.**

**And now I think I know what you tried to say to me. How you suffered for your sanity; how you tried to set them free. They would not listen; they're not listening still. Perhaps they never will.**

**I believe that God sent Robert to us as a prophet to set us free from the corrupting ways of the world. He showed us how to live an innocent life, a life of pure love, a life of self-giving, joyfully embracing and protecting all of creation, great and small, in warmth and affection, as Christ Himself did.**

**Are you listening? Are you listening still? Will you listen now?**