Memorial Mass - Richard Keefe
St. Louis University High School - Si Commons
25 October 2025

Introduction

The readings we just heard draw us into what the Scriptures call blessedness.

But “blessing” in the Gospel sense isn’t simply comfort or success. It’s the deep peace of knowing that we are loved by God, that God walks with us, and that our lives have meaning in His sight.

That’s the blessing Dick Keefe lived and gave.

He didn’t talk much about himself, and he certainly didn’t seek attention. He lived modestly, almost quietly—but anyone who crossed his path walked away more seen, more grounded, and more hopeful.

He taught generations of young men at SLUH not only French, but humanity—how to listen, how to learn, and how to love.

- He made time for everyone: the student soaring academically and the one barely holding on.
- His office door was always open, and it became, for many, holy ground.

Movement I: The Mountain of the Lord
Isaiah tells us that on God's mountain,

- "the Lord will remove the veil that veils all peoples…He will wipe away the tears from every face."

That promise of a mountain banquet isn't just about heaven someday; it's also about moments on this side of heaven when God's tenderness breaks through.

- It's a vision of a God who loves to feed His people—who gathers them, nourishes them, and heals their hearts.

He taught generations of students how to taste life deeply. Think of the tables Dick set over the years:

- The cafeteria table where he sat down beside a struggling freshman—not to scold, but to listen—and offered a wager of lunches that eventually turned a lost student into a confident young man.
- The countless dinners he shared with alumni who'd long since graduated but still sought his counsel.
- Rose Anne and John Mueller discovered something they never knew about Dick: When they went to his apartment to clean things up, they found over a dozen jars of pickles
- The gravy lessons at Thanksgiving—first for John Penilla, and decades later for Tate—where food became sacrament.

On that mountain of conversation and care, God was already preparing a feast of mercy through Dick's hands.

Dick's "mountain" wasn't a distant summit—it was a desk covered in papers, a cafeteria table, a seat at the symphony, a letter in the mail, a visit at the right time.

- Those were the holy places where he lifted veils, wiped away tears, and let people see that God's tenderness was closer than they thought.

He showed us that holiness doesn't usually wear vestments or carry titles—it wears a cardigan, listens well, and remembers your name 30 years later.

Movement II: The Shepherd's Calm

The psalmist says, "You are with me… your rod and your staff give me courage."

And St. Paul writes, "Have no anxiety at all… Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just… think about these things."

Those words describe the steady, shepherding presence Dick offered.

- He was the calm in the hallway storm—the voice that could correct you with one raised eyebrow or a dry remark–like "Silence is Golden" or "Over my dead body", then help you find your footing again.
- He guided without fanfare, demanding honesty and effort: "Are you in it for the grade or for the learning?"

One alumnus recalled that he was on the verge of being expelled. Instead of giving up on him, Dick spent hours in his office talking

through choices, helping him get tested for learning issues, and giving him the confidence to keep going. That student stayed at SLUH, graduated, and later said, “He saved me.”

When a student’s life was unraveling, he’d find a way to stitch it back together—helping one boy get tested for ADHD, finding another a summer job, quietly covering the cost of a class ring, or mailing a book halfway across the world to a former student serving in the Peace Corps.

His faith wasn’t abstract; it was Philippians made flesh—whatever was true, honorable, just, and lovely, he thought about these things, and he helped his students do the same.

Movement III: The Beatitudes Made Flesh
Jesus begins the Sermon on the Mount by going up a mountain—the same image as Isaiah’s.

In Dick, we see those Beatitudes lived quietly and completely.

- Dick was poor in spirit: He lived simply, owned more classical CDs than clothes, and gave away whatever he had.
- He was a man who knew sadness and mourning: He carried in his heart the loss of his sister Mary Margaret and, out of that sorrow, learned how to comfort others in theirs—like the alumnus whose baby died, to whom Dick brought a framed poem his grandfather had written a century earlier.
- He was merciful: He turned detention into discipleship; “trouble” was just another word for opportunity.

- The peacemakers: He drew together generations—students, parents, colleagues, friends—so many of whom considered him family.

Even after retirement, he kept teaching—helping students in prison earn their GEDs, guiding seniors in writing their graduation speeches, sending letters to former students around the world. He kept finding ways to bless.

He wasn't loud about his faith, but he lived it so consistently that his life became a homily:

- Blessed are those who listen first.
- Blessed are those who show up.
- Blessed are those who make others believe they matter.

Conclusion – The Banquet Fulfilled

He believed that God's love could transform anything, even sorrow. And that's what we celebrate today: the transformation of a life poured out into a blessing that continues far beyond the years he lived.

In Philippians, Paul urges us: "Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely—think about these things."

When we think about Dick Keefe, those are exactly the words that come to mind.

He was true in his friendship, honorable in his integrity, just in his dealings, pure in his intentions, and lovely in his presence.

We call him blessed—not because life was easy, but because he walked through it with courage, humor, and grace. He taught others to believe they were loved, and in doing so, he revealed the face of God.

All those dinners, those gravy lessons, those cafeteria conversations were rehearsals for the great banquet of heaven—where the Lord now seats him and says:

“You spent your life setting the table for others; now come and take your place at mine.”