Fr Matthew Charlesworth, SJ
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Funeral Mass for the repose of the soul of Edward Felix Blonski

Date: Wednesday, July 19, 2017 | **Season:** Ordinary Time after Easter | **Year:** A
First Reading: Ecclesiastes 3:1-9
Responsorial Psalm: Hallelujah (by Leonard Cohen) | **Response:** Hallelujah!
Second Reading: Psalm 28:6-9
Gospel Acclamation: Hallelujah
Gospel Reading: John 6:37-40
Preached at: the Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Braamfontein **in the** Archdiocese of Johannesburg, South Africa**.**

On behalf of Edward's family, and all of us at Holy Trinity, I'd like to thank you all for coming here today. In our first reading we heard that there is a time for everything, a time to search and a time to give up, a time to be silent, and a time to speak, a time to laugh and a time to weep. Over the last few weeks Edward's family have been through trying times, but today we have come to this time, this very special time together, to remember Edward Felix Blonski (b. 16 Feb 1985 d. 11 July 2017).

Specifically, we have come here today to do three things.

The most important one, of course, is to celebrate Edward: his life, what he meant to each of us; and to remember the goodness, the kindness and the gentleness that so many of you have remarked upon during these terrible weeks of fear, uncertainty, and confusion. In these days we've seen such an outpouring of concern and support for the family who found themselves dealing with the most confused and unimaginable of circumstances, and I know they are grateful to everyone who has reached out to them. They have asked all the questions they could and because of this have arrived at a point of being able to say goodbye this morning to their beloved Edward. I know their wish today is to ask you all to simply celebrate his life with them. To speak of what Edward meant and means to us.

I do not think anyone here would disagree with me if I said that Edward had a large heart. I got to know Edward on a more personal level around 2007. I had grown up with the Blonski family as a familiar fixture at Sunday Mass when we were yay-high, as they always seemed to occupy the front row at Victory Park.

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We never spoke too much but it never felt that Mass was ‘normal’ if they were not there. Some of us became altar servers together. Edward was much younger but I have another later memory of Edward at St Andrews College in Grahamstown. St Andrew’s got a new headmaster who happened to have been my headmaster in Johannesburg so I went to say hello, and as I looked across the quad I saw Ed huddled with a group of friends. We exchanged glances, perhaps a faint glimmer of swift recognition, and he suddenly turned away, too cool, I felt, to come and say hello – or perhaps too afraid to go near the Headmaster. I got the sense that he was the center of attention, the one in the group others loved to be around. Perhaps even the one who got into trouble every now and then, or became a character in one of the surviving school legends.

Fast forward a few years and Edward is at University attending this very church. He was more serious by that stage, grown-up of course, almost philosophical and able to articulate deep questions – shy and almost reserved – talking about architecture: he loved beauty and building things – but perhaps struggled with translating all his hopes into reality. We went for coffee once or twice – he asked about a book on knowing and doing the will of God so as to experience God’s love. He seemed very earnest. Around that time his mother died. This hit him terribly hard. To the point, as others have said in hindsight, he could not recover. Many of you here today were at her funeral. To my regret I never got to taste some of his cooking which he enjoyed doing, but over the years we kept in touch, chatting online. He was always gentle, but now he was searching and struggling – still I think trying to understand what God wanted of him, but all-too-aware of his limitations.

We all might remember different sides of Ed. I can only say that the side I saw and treasured and want to celebrate, was of a generous, loving person – in search of someone to love, and to be loved. He had a faith that he learnt from his parents, especially perhaps, his mother. In a real way, I think he would have loved the Psalm we sang together – ‘Hallelujah’. I suppose people interpret it differently, but I see it as a description of a faith-journey. Because even when he’s cold and broken, David still says ‘Hallelujah’ – which is Hebrew for Praise God. Which is also the theme of the second reading Julian chose today. Edward praised God even when it was difficult. In the words of Leonard Cohen, Edward knew his life was not a ‘victory march’ but he also knew that God was there for

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him, even as he searched for him. He innately knew that God's yes to each of us, was greater than any no we might say to Him. And Edward believed in the Resurrection, in life after death. His faith is ours as well.

Edward once posted publicly:

> "Thank you to the Lord for always keeping me in check. The relationship's not over, yet it is difficult to understand why it grows the way it does…"

The miracle of Ed for me is that even in the moments of difficulty and hardship, he always seemed to have a sense of faith and hope that tomorrow would be better, that growth was possible, and that he needed to grow.

I share this story because Edward took his faith seriously and that is what I want to celebrate with you all today. We all might have different memories to celebrate of Ed. He knew he was not perfect. He was honest with God. He struggled with what he called 'his cross'. I wasn't totally aware of what that truly meant for him – very few of us can honestly articulate our crosses for they are so deeply personal – but he edified me in his faith and in his perseverance. He once said to me about God and religion:

> "Even though I mess up and sometimes take it a bit too seriously, he's there still."

Edward's sense of God, led him to see God in others. He was generous and warm-hearted. Many people in this parish remember Ed, either as an altar server during daily lunch time Masses, or as a helper at the soup kitchens for the homeless with the St Vincent de Paul Society: he was always a quiet steady presence in the background, willing to help and be relied upon.

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Edward helping at the St Vincent de Paul Soup Kitchen for the homeless, at Holy Trinity Catholic Church.

He treasured the Eucharist, the spiritual food, which we will share together later, but he was just as concerned with ensuring people had actual food. He initially came to the Soup kitchens, perhaps because of his aunt. But even after she passed on, Ed kept coming back to help. Of course, with more studies and more work he moved around a bit, but when Edward went missing we circulated his poster among some of the homeless and twelve of them remembered Ed and independently told us in the parish how they set about searching for him. They were visibly sad when they learnt of his passing.

Edward touched more people in his all-too-brief life than even he realized.

But wherever he went the qualities of gentleness, kindness and generosity keep being recounted. We need to treasure these memories. We need to tell each other these stories so that we do not forget the good moments.

Ed's large heart was made larger, perhaps, by the Helen-shaped hole that was left in it which allowed so much more in. It allowed him to truly empathize with people who suffered. He was compassionate in that original sense of having

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shared in that passion, that suffering. He could engage with other sufferers because it was something he felt himself. He never thought of himself as being above other people.

I take comfort, and I am sure you join me in this, in knowing that Edward is now reunited with his mother – whom he loved and who I think always made him feel special – and with his God, who he genuinely spent much of his life praising.

Let's celebrate everything that Edward meant for us. Let's celebrate the moments in his life where he loved us and showed us what it was like to live and to persevere. Honestly struggling but clinging onto the faith that God was there, that there was good work that needed doing, and that he could contribute where he could, to the best of his ability.

I said we are here today for three things. The second thing we do today, after celebrating, is mourn, not for Edward who we truly believe is finally at peace, and for which we must of course give thanks. But we mourn for ourselves. We mourn for what Edward's loss means for us, and especially for his family.

We mourn for what we might have done, or could have done together were Edward still with us. We mourn because just as Edward felt that a piece of him inside was broken with his mother's passing, we now experience the same pain because of Edward's disappearance from our lives. Each of us now has an Edward-shaped hole in our hearts, but I am sure Edward would want us to use that hole the way he desired and tried to. To become more generous, more kind, more gentle, more compassionate.

I was very moved by the selections of readings and hymns which Edward's family chose today. In the beginning Krystyna reminded us on Edward's behalf that:

> "Whatever we were to each other that we are still, Play, smile, think of me, pray for me".

And this is the third thing that we do today. To pray in thanksgiving for Edward's life. We pray for Edward and for ourselves who mourn him. We pray to increase our faith and our hope that we might love as Edward loved.

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Edward's faith in his Lord and God was so apparent that we have to trust in the words of Jesus in today's Gospel, where Jesus tells us about the Resurrection that awaits all of us:

> "I will not reject anyone who comes to me, because I came down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of the one who sent me. And this is the will of the one who sent me, that I should not lose anything of what he gave me, but that I should raise it on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have eternal life, and I shall raise him on the last day." (John 6:37–40)

So we celebrate Edward, his life that we, as Kazik said, were so lucky to share in, and especially Edward's faith in the Resurrection, along with the great love and support of his family and his friends. God the Father gave Edward to us, for so short a time. But it is His Will that he should be raised up with Jesus, and be reunited with his mother Helen – happy and at peace, smiling and laughing, and waiting for the rest of us to join him in paradise. The only response I have to this, is the response I believe Edward would have said: 'Hallelujah'.

Leonard Cohen's original Hallelujah had around 80 verses. His final verse ends with the couplet:

> "I'll stand before the Lord of Song
> With nothing on my tongue but Hallelujah."

Let's all remember and celebrate Ed's life, let us praise God for Edward, and with him, say to the Lord, together:

Hallelujah.
Hallelujah.
Hallelujah.

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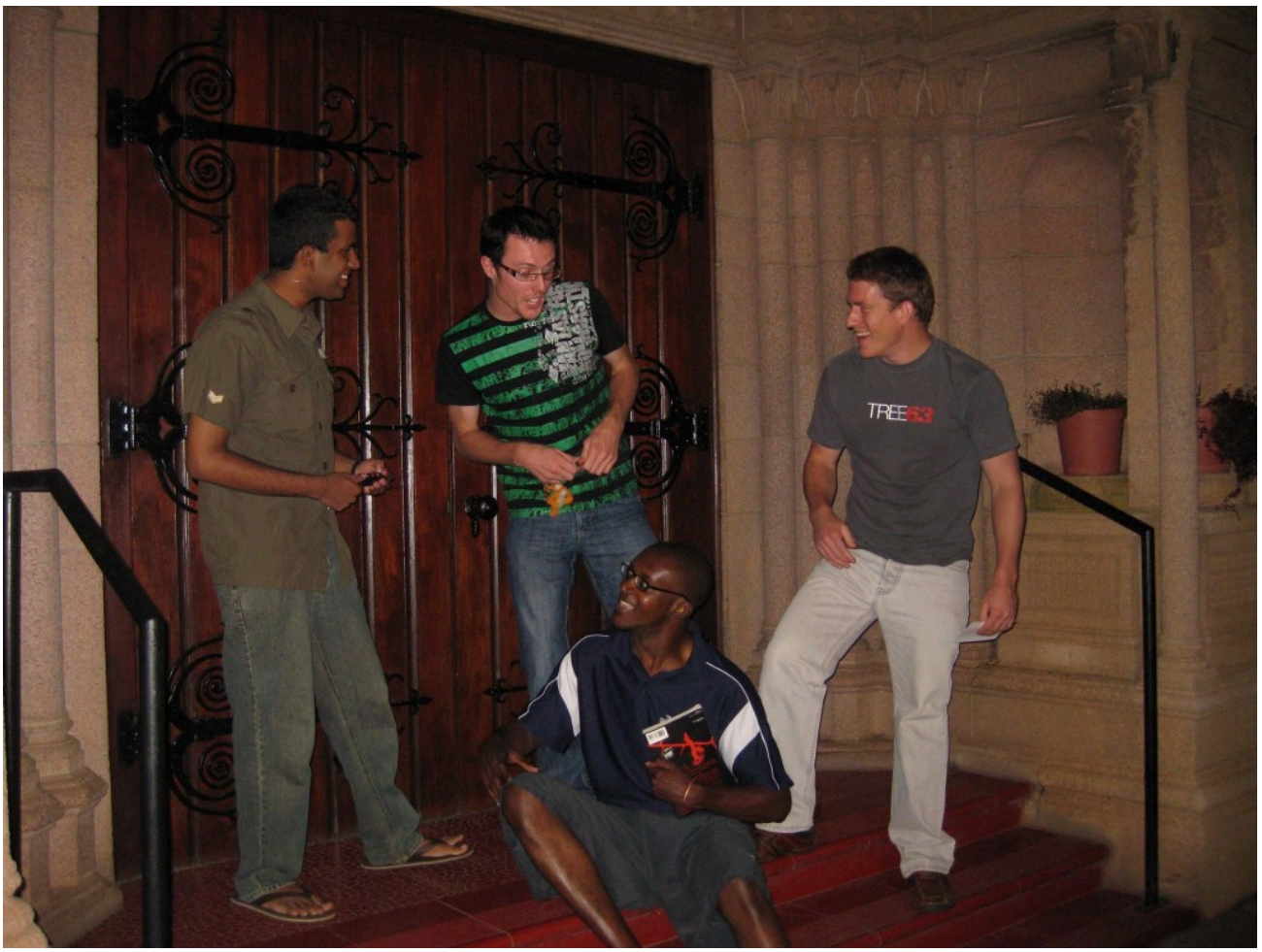

Edward with friends outside Church.

Letter of Condolence from the Apostolic Nunco, His Excellenecy, Archbishop Peter B. Wells

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