

REMARKS OF MARK ABRAMS, MAY 24, 2017

“The John Cardinal Foley Award for Excellence in Communications”

(after audio-video presentation)

Wow! That was incredible.

I can't help but think back to that famous expression Cardinal Foley used to use whenever HE was recognized with special honors.

He'd say: "You know, it's really wonderful to be canonized without having to go through the inconvenience of dying first."

I understand now what he meant.

Before I continue, I'd like you all to please give Bill Roswell a round of applause for preparing that wonderful audio-photo montage introduction. And, thanks to my KYW Newsradio colleague Michelle Durham for voicing it.

Thank you, Bill.

And, now, to begin....

Bishop Senior

My good friends – “The Men in Black” as I fondly refer to you all in clerical garb.

Father Dailey, distinguished academics, members of the board who selected me for this prestigious honor, friends of the seminary, media colleagues, members of my family who are here, friends, and ladies and gentlemen.

It is indeed humbling to be standing here before you tonight.

I know Cardinal Foley is with us tonight. My good friend and mentor has been looking out for all of us since his passing six years ago. There isn't a day that goes by that I don't think of him. I count on him as one of my intercessors in my daily rosary prayers.

I am gratified to be recognized with this award bearing his name.

Because of his assistance, over the years I was able to gather and report on some of the great moments in Roman Catholic Church history.

Among them, the canonization of Philadelphia's St. Katherine Drexel, the election of Pope Benedict the Sixteenth, and even sharing in stories of Pope John Paul the Second.

And, of course, there was the Cardinal's final commentary that he did for us from the KYW TV studios describing John Paul's beatification Mass – indeed a special occasion for the Cardinal's former boss who he served from 1984 until John Paul's death.

The cardinal did not live to see John Paul elevated to sainthood. But he watched it all from heaven.

Now, I'm sure many of you have heard many times the story he told of his waiting in the Philippines for Pope John Paul II to arrive for the World Youth Day Mass. If you haven't, see me afterward and I'll pass it along.

Let me just relate this (imitate Foley's Pope John Paul II laugh)

Then-Archbishop Foley was the point man who helped make our coverage of the Vatican, the Catholic Church, and the 2005 election of Pope Benedict great. He accommodated so many media who were in Rome for the funeral of John Paul II and the election of a new pope.

But he made time for us – despite the sea of media - because he loved Philadelphia AND he loved KYW Newsradio.

After Benedict's election, Archbishop Foley got us tickets to the Paul the Sixth hall where he had arranged special seating for my colleague, Bill

Roswell, his wife, Kathy, and my wife, Sue, both of whom arrived in Rome just hours before Benedict was elected and witnessed history with us.

Okay, Paul the Sixth Hall – a day or so after Benedict was elected. And, where was my seat? In the elevated press gallery where there was an audio connection. I got up in this cramped space, barely able to move around. I could hardly see the new pope when he came out, but I could hear him.

After I got back down to the main floor, I hooked up with Bill and our wives and they told me what a wonderful experience it was to see the new pope so close up.

“Glad you all enjoyed it,” I said. “I was stuck in a closet.”

But it was all worth it because Archbishop Foley made it possible for me to do my job – get that clean audio.

I remember doing many stories about a variety of issues in the church with Archbishop, then Cardinal Foley over the years. He always answered our calls from Philadelphia.

Then, there was the story of Archbishop Foley’s elevation to cardinal and his new role taking care of the shrines in the Holy Land.

Of course, what was MY first question?

“What about Christmas Midnight Mass? Are you still going to do the commentary?”

“Yes,” Cardinal Foley said. “My new role doesn’t change that.”

The Ghost of Christmas Midnight Mass would continue to herald the arrival of a newborn king for millions around the world watching on TV each Christmas Eve. I was one of them.

And, then, a few years later, there was the stunning announcement that the Cardinal had decided after 25 years to retire from that labor of love.

He was so gracious in that telephone interview from Rome explaining his decision. It was a big story for us. And, I had the pleasure a few years later to meet and interview his successor, Msgr. Tom Powers.

There are so many people I'd like to thank now....we'll call this the Oscars part of the speech. Except, I won't have an orchestra playing a few notes to tell me my time is up.

First and foremost, I'd like to thank my parents – Bill and Joyce who are here tonight. (Would you please recognize them with a round of applause)

They are the ones who instilled in me the values and principles of faith and family.

My sister, Anne. I'm her older brother and just crossed that big 6-0 barrier last week. It's just a number, Anne.

Thanks, for being so supportive of my work and of all that life has held for us. And, for telling me that you do listen two, three, four times a day.

My son, Jordan, who just completed his ordeal for Scouting's Order of the Arrow organization up at the Hawk Mountain Scout Reservation, and is a few merit badges shy and a project for Eagle Scout.

His brother, Jonathan, couldn't be with us tonight because of work obligations. But he, too, is an Eagle Scout.

I wish my son, Josh, also an Eagle Scout who's living in Alexandria, VA, and daughter, Amy, who made me a grandfather seven months ago, could be here. But they have obligations, too. But, I want to publicly thank them for their love and support.

Did I mention Scouting is a big part of my life? Oh, wait, the presentation did.

I also want to thank Sue, the mother of my children, and a uniquely talented woman who took a lot of the pictures from Rome 2005 that you saw – except the one of us with the archbishop. She is missed, but not forgotten on this night.

Bill Roswell, who has been a long-time colleague and friend.

You can blame Bill for me being on KYW Newsradio. He was the one who convinced me to accept a full-time position at the station all those years ago.

I'm pleased to have Father Bill Seifert from St. Patrick's Church in Pottsville here tonight. He's a long-time friend, the deacon at my wedding, and the one who looked after me while I was at St. Pius X Seminary in the Scranton area with him for just a short time.

Yes, a little reveal here, I was in the seminary briefly studying for the Allentown Diocese all the way back in 1975. He was ordained – me, well, here I am. God had other plans.

Father Gene Ritz is also here tonight from Berks Catholic High School in Reading. He is a good friend and on a fast-track to a canon law degree for service in the Diocese of Allentown.

And, special thanks to my long-time good friend, Jesuit Father Robert McTeigue, of the Maryland province who has been a confidante and a true brother. He came all the way from Buffalo to be here tonight.

There are so many others to thank, but I'd be here until midnight and some of us have to work tomorrow. For those of you who have helped me along my career path, took my calls, participated in stories – yes, you, too, Rocco – I want to express my deepest thanks and appreciation.

Let me share a very personal story about how I am convinced Cardinal Foley continues to watch over me and helped me from the heavenly kingdom.

As you know, we were blessed to have Pope Francis visit Philadelphia in September 2015.

He stayed right here at the seminary during what was a whirlwind weekend visit for the World Meeting of Families.

I had the pleasure of working on Saturday night, the night of the Festival of Families on the Benjamin Franklin Parkway with another good friend, Father Felipe, who was our translator and knew Pope Francis from his days in Argentina.

But the marquee event of the weekend – was the pope’s Sunday Mass on the parkway.

I can remember this vividly. Father Felipe, Bill Roswell our producer and engineer, and myself were ready to hit the air for what we at KYW Newsradio call live, wall-to-wall coverage of the Mass.

Father Felipe led us in prayer. And, we were ready to begin.

Or so I thought.

I sat there in those moments before it all began and, for the first time in my career, I froze.

I thought to myself, what am I doing here? I’m not worthy of doing this?

I was having doubts I could pull this off. I had everything ready...but....

And, I quickly paused and silently prayed to Cardinal Foley, asking him to give me the strength to perform this special task – as he would – and to do it for the greater honor and glory of God.

We hit the air and I am told it sounded flawless. I was so relieved we got through it successfully without technical issues, stumbles or complications.

I have never heard the audio of that entire Mass to this day. Bill, I have the CDs and I promise I will listen to them.

The next morning, our boss at KYW, Steve Butler, whom I also thank for the many opportunities I have had to cover so many events over the years, sat in our news staff meeting.

As he finished handing out the assignments, he paused and looked at me and said: “Do you have an announcement for us?”

I looked kind of dumbfounded and said, “Uh, what do you mean?”

Steve said: "When were you going to tell us you were leaving to go to Rome to pick up Cardinal Foley's role of doing the commentary for the Masses."

And, my colleagues applauded me. What a moment!

I told them, "No, I'm just fine here, thanks!"

As I conclude tonight, I'd like to leave you with some words of Cardinal Foley.

I was honored to be part of Cardinal Foley's last public appearance as he accepted the "Person of the Year of Award" from the Philadelphia Broadcast Pioneers organization.

He did so by a video message recorded and played just weeks before he left us.

If you'll allow me, I'd like to share with you what he said to us at that Broadcast Pioneers event.

He told us:

"While my work has been almost exclusively religious, I think you should all consider your work not necessarily as religious, but as sacred.

"You all have a special bond with the people to whom you communicate. You owe them respect, you should treat them with dignity, you should challenge them to goodness.

"You have a great opportunity to influence the lives of others. They look up to you.

"They look to you for information, for formation for inspiration.

"Please never fail to give them these types of encouragement, this sacred bond which should exist between you and your listeners and your viewers.

"And, as broadcast pioneers all of you - may you continue to bring people to truth and to love in a society which needs both."

No truer words were spoken by this saintly man. And, they are even more relevant today as we toil in a world divided by fear, hatred, and incivility.

Let us all pledge tonight to follow the Cardinal's admonition to us:

"May you continue to bring people to truth and to love in a society that needs both."

May God's Holy Name be praised, now and forever!

Thank you and good night.