## Eulogy for Professor Adam Milani

Before I went into the priesthood, I was the general manager of a Wendy's restaurant for a number of years. I saw something one day that I will never forget: as we were emptying the trash, I noticed a rather curious phenomena: where the concrete ended behind our store and where the next building began and rose from, a tomato plant with a budding tomato had flowered. This was amazing because it grew with no soil, but I could see that perhaps some tomato seeds had washed their way down there from the dumpster, and gotten embedded in the very tiniest and narrow crack between the collision of concrete and brick. I was spellbound by what I saw . . . and it reminded me that God can do anything that looks impossible to us.

Looking back into the first few weeks after Adam's accident on a hockey rink, into that dark time when it became more and more apparent that he would lose the bulk of his mobility forever, could any one of us have imagined that he would have finished school, gone on to a pretty good college there in South Bend, graduate law school at Duke University, and practice law and teach law, and manage to publish a few books on the side? Adam's life is a reminder that God can do anything that looks impossible to us.

And yet we gather today in sadness and confusion to say "Goodbye" (for now) to our son and brother, our friend and colleague, and for me, a parishioner and personal hero. With what shall we all come before the Lord today? A spirit of gratitude: gratitude for the life and witness of Adam, and for the hope that he inspired in all of us, in spite of all of the foibles and traps that make us human. A spirit of hope: a hope that Adam's life gave to the countless men, women, and children who suffer from a disability; and a spirit of patience, to help us understand that this is God's will at work today.

The Gospel reading from Mark could not be a more perfect analogy. Adam wanted to see the Lord, and Adam needed his friends to help him through some pretty dark moments so that he *could* see the Lord in his

suffering; the Lord present in the care, concern, and love of his family and friends. Often this required complete humility and submission to the realization that there were limits to his own independence, and to the dawning understanding in Adam that it was an honor and a joy for us to help him. In the Gospel reading today, see how the lame man's friends loved him . . . loved him enough to carry him and lower him through the roof into the presence of the Savior. The story is a little more dramatic than the reality: houses in the Ancient Near East were not much higher than the average human being, and by simply clearing away the grass and thatch on the roof, a hole could be made big enough to lift a man over their heads and through an opening in the ceiling. Today our prayers lift Adam up and over our heads, and the first thing that Adam will do when he rises above the power of death is this: he will run to the Lord. What a beautiful image to abide in us and sustain us through these sad hours.

In spite of the great inspiration that Adam's life offered to us, there is no doubt that he suffered not only publicly at times, but privately. Perhaps one of the greatest things he had to suffer through was that he was a liberal democrat in central Georgia of all places. I'm sure there were numerous occasions when Adam just thought to himself, "I am just surrounded by right-wing fanatic rednecks." And you know what Adam . . . you were right!! However, and just as an aside, won't it be quite a revelation for Adam to look up one day in heaven, and see President Ronald Reagan. Adam would appreciate the levity, as he was an artisan of humor and irony himself. It serves as a reminder to us that when we have Christ, even in our suffering and disability, that nothing can contain the spirit of joy. In our gratitude today, we remember that joy and pray that it will sustain us in our own journeys as believers.

Of the many things that Adam was in life: a Christian, an attorney, a voice for the disabled, and a devoted sports fan, we cannot forget that his last stage in life was as and educator, a teacher. Geoffrey Chaucer said of the Oxford scholar, "and gladly would he learn, and gladly teach." We will never know nor appreciate the ripple effects of Adam's dedication to teaching law, and especially the law that protects and enables those whose lives have encountered illness and the vagaries of tragic occurrence. The books and articles that he authored and coauthored will continue to help those in need long after we leave this sanctuary today. Just a small reminder that the Lord Himself was a teacher, and the ripple effects of his message are alive in every corner of the earth as well. My point is not to canonize Adam today, but to show the import that his life will have long after we are all gone, because we have already seen the import that his life has had in each of us. Our Lord was the prisoner of the cross for just a few hours; Adam

was prisoner to his wheelchair for a very long time, but the funny thing about our brother, the educator, that he never learned about himself, was that he had been free of that wheelchair for a very long time.

I know I speak for the Milani family and for Adam himself, in thanking those here present and those who have been a part of Adam's life, especially those who were there to help when the chips were down. No "thank you" will ever be enough, and no "thank you" is truly even needed. For those who entered Adam's world and were a part of it, there was a mutual exchange of grace. Like the friends in the Gospel who lowered *their* Adam into the Lord's presence, we today, through our presence, our prayers, and our love, pray for that same happiness: that Adam is now in the Lord's presence forever. We thank God for the gift of Adam to our lives, and for showing us again that God can do anything that looks impossible to the rest of us. May he rest in peace. May his soul, and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace.

Father Tim Donahue