

Murphy recalled as priest's priest

SEATTLE TIMES STAFF

As news of the death of Seattle Archbishop Thomas Murphy spread across the city and the country, he was recalled as an inspiration, a leader and a man totally dedicated to his work.

Friends remembered the many hours he spent along the Interstate 5 corridor, visiting parishes, talking with people and encouraging vocations to religious life.

Peers and priests cited his leadership, his work and his concern for his priests.

"I would say that we probably have seen a truly great archbishop die," said the Rev. James Gandrau of St. Alphonsus Church in Ballard. "He was the best. He literally laid down his life for his friends," by refusing to retire.

Gandrau said the most poignant moment in the archbishop's final days came at the annual retreat for diocesan priests at Ocean Shores in mid-June. Although Murphy had just completed a blood transfusion, he drove to Ocean Shores to be with his priests.

Gandrau said it was obvious that the archbishop was dying. "He gave a beautiful talk, returning to the podium three times, like he was saying: 'This may be my last time with you.'"

"One of the young priests was weeping in the corner because he was so moved."

The archbishop "was never maudlin, never 'poor me.' He was a man of tremendous faith. Anybody can teach you how to live, it takes a great man to teach you how to die."

Murphy, Gandrau said, was "a priest first, an archbishop second and an administrator third. He did much to restore the morale and confidence of the priests in the diocese."

The Rev. Michael G. Ryan, pastor of St. James Cathedral said: "I feel in a personal way that I have lost not only a bishop for whom I had the greatest respect, but a friend." Bishop Anthony Pilla of Cleveland, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, said Murphy had the respect of all the U.S. hierarchy. Pilla said Murphy brought "good humor as well as his acute intelligence" to his work.

Bishop Alex J. Brunett, head of the Catholic diocese in Helena, Mont., praised Archbishop Murphy as a model of commitment.

"He was an inspiration for his total dedication to his work, traveling around the diocese, always meeting people and never waiting for people to come to him," said Brunett.

Brunett said Murphy also was an inspiration during the time of his illness. "He never complained. He never gave the impression that God singled him out for punishment. He did not have that 'Why me?' syndrome."

Brunett said retired Seattle Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen was in Helena, Mont., where his brother is a priest, but church officials had not been able to reach him with the news this morning.

Brunett said when he was appointed bishop of Helena in 1994, Murphy called him, offered him any help he might need and also offered him the use of his summer cottage at Red Lodge, Mont.

The Rev. Stephen V. Sundborg, president of Seattle University, said Murphy "has demonstrated outstanding pastoral leadership in Western Washington as archbishop. He has been a strong supporter of education, of the university, and of its Jesuit mission," Sundborg said.

The archbishop was presented an honorary doctor of humanities degree by the university just two weeks ago.

At O'Dea High School, Assistant Principal James Walker recalled that the archbishop made a point of saying masses before football games. At graduation time, seniors would all go to his house for a barbecue. The most recent was about a month ago.

At news of his death, summer-school classes were stopped for prayers at O'Dea.

Seattle Times staff reporters Lee Moriwaki, Susan Gilmore, Arthur Santana and Antoinette Alexander contributed to this report.
