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Parishioners, priests remember Murphy

SEATTLE TIMES STAFF

Babies in bassinets, dignified seniors with canes, the rich and the poor — people from all walks of life came to share their grief and celebrate the life of Archbishop Thomas Murphy at St. James Cathedral last night.

The forest-green velvet archbishop's chair was empty, a purple drape — the color of mourning — across it.

"For those of us who have to deal with his absence, this is a painful time," Father Michael Ryan said during an earlier Mass yesterday.

This was, he said, "the day that — let's be honest — we weren't really prepared for. We've lost a shepherd, a leader, a true apostle and a friend and so much more."

The congregation sang what Ryan said was one of Murphy's favorite hymns, "Lord of All Happiness."

"We sang it in his hospital room in the wee hours of the night," he said. "I sense he heard it then. I know he hears it now."

Parishioners said they've lost not only a spiritual leader, but also a man of great humor and warmth.

"I feel I've lost a friend and the church has lost a great leader," said Sapina Pele, a parishioner from St. George Church who attended Mass at St. James yesterday.

"He's really going to be missed by the different ethnic communities," Pele said.

He was also great with children, she said.

Elsewhere, friends, associates and parishioners praised Murphy as a man who always put others ahead of himself.

"I'll never forget Archbishop Murphy's strength and support when this community mourned the loss of four Seattle firefighters. His spiritual guidance was a source of great comfort and solace for me personally, and

for the grieving families," said Mayor Norm Rice.

Pittsburgh Bishop Donald Wuerl, who in 1985 was an auxiliary bishop here, said he wrote Murphy after illness forced the archbishop to turn back on his way to a recent bishops' meeting in Kansas City.

"I wrote to him . . . not realizing that he was seriously ill.

"I feel I've lost a friend as well as a co-worker," said Wuerl, who had known Murphy for nearly 20 years.

Retired Seattle Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen marveled at Murphy's energy as he fought his illness.

"He had an honest desire to be present to all people. He wore himself out," said Hunthausen, Murphy's immediate predecessor. "He was on the move all the time, even in his last illness. He would say, 'This is where I get my energy, being with the people.' He didn't spare himself."

At O'Dea High School, summer-school classes were stopped for prayer. Assistant Principal James Walker recalled that the archbishop made a point of celebrating Masses before the school's football games. At graduation time, seniors would all go his house for a barbecue. The most recent was about a month ago.

Mike Grady, who graduated a year ago, remembered how the archbishop would talk to the seniors, joking and offering them guidance. Grady, now attending Notre Dame University, said Murphy offered to write a letter to help him get into that university.

"He was always doing things to help us," said Grady.

Seattle Times staff reporters Nancy Bartley, Susan Gilmore, Janet I-Chin Tu, Melanie Brennan, Arthur Santana and Antoinette Alexander contributed to this report.