

Before beginning this morning, there is something that needs to be corrected. The article that appeared in the Evergreen Park Patch about Fr. Adamich contained a photo of him and some of the younger students in our school. The caption below the photo mentioned that Fr. Adamich retired as pastor of Most Holy Redeemer in 1992. To set the record straight, Fr. Adamich was never the pastor of Most Holy Redeemer. But that didn't stop him from thinking that he was. He always had ideas about what should be done and how it should be done – his way.

Last Saturday, Jack and his wife came to start cleaning out Fr. Al's room in the rectory – a Herculean task. I went up to see how they were doing and if they needed anything. As we talked, I noticed a piece of paper sticking out from under a book on his TV stand. The paper had the number 101 written on it. I knew what it was – a card one of the students had made for his 101st birthday this past May. Even though I knew it was a birthday card, my first thoughts were not of cakes or candles or singing "Happy Birthday." The first thing that popped into my head when I saw that 101 was dogs. Dalmatians. 101 of them. I thought, "What is wrong with you? Why would you think of a movie instead of Al's birthday?" Then I thought again and decided that maybe it was appropriate that I thought of a movie. In so many ways, Fr. Adamich's life has resembled a number of movies.

There is an old movie called, "The Man Who Came to Dinner." It's about a man who is supposed to go to a family's home for dinner. He slips in front of their house, hurts his hip, and ends up staying with the family. He never leaves. Finally, they get rid of him, and as he's going down the steps in front of their house, he slips again..... When Fr. Adamich came here in 1991, he was looking for a parish he could serve in for a year before he retired. Fr. Devine, who was pastor at the time and a classmate and friend of Fr. Al's, told him he could come here for that final year. He did, and like the man who came to dinner, he never left! He was here for 32 years.

During those 32 years, Fr. Adamich shoveled a lot of snow. That is where people often saw him as they drove by. He claimed it was exercise for him, but it also gave him a way to interact with people as they would stop to talk to him. Many offered to help, but he always refused help. When I asked him why he never accepted any offers to help, he said, "They don't

do it the right way." For him, there was a whole science to shoveling snow. You only take half a shovel full at a time so you don't hurt your back or strain your heart. You also had to pile it up in a certain way so that water from the melting snow would run off into the street and down the sewer instead of flowing back onto the sidewalk where it could freeze and someone could slip. Only he knew the secret, a secret he never shared.

I became used to Fr. Al shoveling snow, so used to it that I never worried about the snow getting shoveled since I knew he would be on the job. Then one year, when Christmas Eve was on a Sunday, it started to snow in the afternoon. It was coming down pretty hard and by 3 o'clock, everything was covered with several inches of snow. I was working on the homily I had to give at the 4:00 Mass as the snow piled up. But I wasn't worried. I knew Al would have the front of the church cleared for the large crowd that would be there for Mass, only he didn't have the front of the church cleared. He didn't have anything cleared. He was sitting in front of the TV watching a football game. Frantic, I threw on my coat and grabbed a shovel and went outside. Unlike him, if anyone stopped and asked if I needed help, I took it. Due to a good number of people who helped, we got the snow cleared in time for Mass. We didn't care how we piled it up either. I asked him later what happened. He told me, "Ahh, I don't think I'm going to do it anymore." In that moment, his life resembled the movie "Airplane." Like Lloyd Bridges, he sure picked the wrong week to quit shoveling snow.

Fr. Adamich was a child of the Great Depression. Growing up at that time in our country's history, he learned not to waste anything. You didn't throw things away. You tried to use them. Once he came into the kitchen when I was making something. "What are you making?" he asked. "Bread pudding," I replied. "We had that French bread that was sitting there on the counter, so I thought I'd use it." He nodded his approval, not because he was looking forward to dessert, but because I wasn't letting the bread go to waste. He hated to see anyone throw anything away. Because he couldn't stand to see anything thrown away, his room was filled with all kinds of things, things he should have thrown away long ago, but held onto thinking someday he, or someone else, could use them.

One of his great fears was falling and not being able to get up. He was afraid that if he fell and couldn't get up, he would not be able to stay in the rectory. So, he used to practice getting up. Fr. Paul walked past the TV room one day and saw him on the floor. "Al!" he yelled. "What happened?" "Oh, I'm just practicing," Fr. Adamich said, and he went from the floor to a chair and pulled himself up onto the chair and then he stood up. His fear of falling and his inclination to not throw anything away combined in his next movie.

A couple of years ago, it was the Tuesday before Thanksgiving. That's the night we have our Thanksgiving dinner at the rectory. Fr. Al always looked forward to it. He would usually be in the kitchen well before dinner, watching me to make sure I was doing everything the right way. That year though, he wasn't in the kitchen watching. It was time to eat, and he still wasn't there. I called his room, but there was no answer. I called the TV room and there was no answer. "Maybe he's in the bathroom," I thought. I called back again 5 minutes later, and still no answer. I went upstairs to see if anything was wrong. I found him in his bedroom. He had fallen, and despite all his practice, he couldn't get up. I called Mark Phelan and he came over to help me get Fr. Al off the floor. We got him onto his bed, and he insisted he was fine. We said, "No, you're going to the hospital." The Fire Department came and brought a stretcher upstairs. They had a hard time getting it into his room and getting him out because of all the items that had accumulated over the years and had piled up in his room. He went to the hospital. To say he went less than willingly would be a huge understatement. While he was in the hospital, a party who will remain nameless cleaned up his rooms. Multiple 55-gallon drums were filled with old magazines and unopened bank statements from 40 years ago, and all kinds of other items that you could rightly consider garbage. His rooms were cleaned up to the point that someone could easily maneuver around inside them. Then he came home from the hospital. He saw his newly cleaned rooms and said, "Looks like somebody didn't think I was coming back." He was furious that someone had gone through his rooms and thrown so much away. He was sure that I had ordered someone to do it, but I hadn't. He continued to be upset about it right up to the end. His life at this point resembled the movie "Stripes." Like Francis Sawyer in

"Stripes," he made it very clear that he didn't want anybody putting their hands on his stuff.

He blamed me for his rooms being cleaned. He blamed me for a lot of things. When his legs would swell up in his later years, it wasn't because he wouldn't take the medication that would have prevented it. No, it was because when I went grocery shopping, I bought the wrong kind of bread. I bought bread that had too much salt in it. So, I started checking the labels on the bread at the store, trying to find the one that had the least amount of salt. I finally found sourdough bread that had 0 mg of sodium. I started buying that and he was happy. It wasn't always the bread. If his legs swelled up after our Tuesday evening meal, he would ask me on Wednesday morning if I had added salt to anything. When I would make the potato salad I would serve as my side dish at the Rib Fest, he would watch me, not only to make sure I was doing it right, but also to see if I was adding salt since he was going to eat some of the salad. I never added salt. Then the next day at the Rib Fest, people would eat the potato salad and say to me, "This is really good, Father. Could use a little salt though." A few weeks ago, when I was making the potato salad for this year's event, I realized Fr. Adamich wasn't watching me. He wouldn't be eating any of the potato salad either. So, I took the saltshaker and emptied it all over the potato salad.

He blamed me that he had to go to the hospital. And he especially blamed me that he had to stay in the hospital. I would go to visit him and he would ask, "When am I getting out of here? When am I coming home? I don't need to be here. Why are you keeping me here?" I would try to tell him that I wasn't keeping him there. His doctor and his therapist hadn't okayed his release. I wanted him to come back. But not until he could walk around and especially get up and down the stairs. "I can walk," he would say. "But what if you get up in the middle of the night to go to the bathroom and you fall?" I would ask. "So? I'll just sleep on the floor. It's warm enough," would be his response. "What if you fall down the stairs and really hurt yourself or worse?" I'd say. "So? If I fall, I fall. What's the big deal?" The big deal was that if anything happened to him, Fr. Paul and I would look like the most heartless, insensitive, and unfeeling people who ever lived.

In the movie "Rudy," Rudy Ruettiger was trying to walk onto the football team at Notre Dame. There's a scene in the movie in which Rudy gets knocked silly during a drill. The coach tries to pull him out of the drill, but Rudy jumps back in yelling, "I can do it, coach!" It was at this point in his hospital stay that Fr. Al turned into Rudy Adamich, telling me that he could walk up and down the hallway and he could get up and down the stairs, and if someone would get him some pants instead of the hospital gown he was wearing, he'd take me to the stairway and show me he could do it. I just rolled my eyes at him like the coach in the movie rolled his eyes at Rudy. And you probably thought being a priest was easy.....

I could go on and on with different movies that Fr. Adamich's life resembled in one way or another, but there is one movie I especially want to get to. It's a movie that unlike "Airplane," or "Stripes," or "Rudy," you probably haven't seen. It's a black and white movie from France, so you have to read the English subtitles. It's called "Monsieur Vincent," and it's about the life of St. Vincent de Paul. There's a scene in the movie in which someone praises Vincent de Paul for all he has done. He has fed the poor. He has given them housing. He has cared for the sick and the dying. He has cared for orphans and unwanted babies. And after listening to this praise he says, "I have done so little." Throughout the movie is the idea that God always asks us to do more.

That was Fr. Adamich. He always had to be doing something. He always had to find a way to be of service to God and others. I often said that his work ethic was his worst enemy. I told him he had done plenty. After all of his many years of service to God and others, he could sit back a little. He could rest on his laurels a little bit. He didn't always have to look for something to do. But he never saw it that way. Part of his motivation for always looking for something to do was fear. He expressed many times that if he could no longer be useful, if he could no longer do anything, he would have no choice but to leave here and go to the old priests' home. I constantly had to reassure him that this was his home as long as he wanted to be here. He didn't have to do anything. He didn't have to go to any old priests' home. As long as I was pastor, he could stay here. I have to confess though that there was a time when he was at the kitchen table

ranting to me about someone or something that wasn't as he thought it should be. I didn't want to hear any more of it. So, I looked at him and said, "The old priests' home is looking better and better." He did a complete 180 in record time. Suddenly, the sun was shining, the birds were singing, and all was right with the world.

Even more than by any unfounded fear of the old priests' home, I think Fr. Adamich was driven by our Lord's words to the rich young man in the gospel: "There is one more thing you must do." That's one thing about our Lord, no matter how much we may have done, He will always ask us to do more. Like St. Vincent de Paul in that movie, Fr. Al realized that. That is why right up until the end, he did whatever he could to serve God and others.

One of the first things I noticed about Fr. Adamich when I met him was the size of his hands. He had huge hands. They were good for the snow shoveling and gardening he did. But those hands also brought comfort to his parishioners over the years as he was with them in moments of sorrow. Those hands brought healing to the sick as he anointed them. How often had he extended those hands towards people in the Sacrament of Reconciliation bringing them God's forgiveness? Those hands brought Christ to others as he celebrated the Eucharist. Those hands helped unite hundreds of couples in marriage. Those hands had brought so many into the Church in baptism and helped so many go home to God at the end of their lives. Those hands had been folded countless times in prayer both with and for others.

He was always so good about visiting the sick in the hospital. He always went to wakes. He would visit the homebound, not just to bring them the Eucharist or anoint them. He would often say Mass for homebound parishioners in their homes. The Mass and the Eucharist were so important to him. He had to say Mass every day. When I first came here, we had so many priests that you weren't assigned to say Mass every day. In addition to myself, there was Fr. Matt, Fr. Adamich, Fr. Ruiz, Fr. Hardy, and we could call on Fr. Dempsey and Fr. Schouten if needed. On days when he wasn't assigned to say a Mass himself, Fr. Adamich would always concelebrate at a Mass. Once I came over and found both Fr. Adamich and Fr. Hardy in the

sacristy waiting to concelebrate at the 6:30 Mass. If I had known they were both going to be there, I would have stayed in bed. But that was such an important part of his life right up until the end. He was always so faithful and devoted to the Mass and the Eucharist.

He helped count the collection. He set things up for Mass. He always looked for ways in which he could help people and make life a little better for them. Some of those ways had nothing to do with church. Once I was cutting up a tomato for a salad for our Tuesday night dinner. He was sitting at the table watching me. "Why are you cutting the tomato like that?" he asked. "Because that's the way I'm cutting it," I replied. He didn't say anything, but later he went to his files, found an article on the proper way to slice a tomato, and left it on the kitchen table for my personal enlightenment. On Friday morning he would always ask me how my Thursday golf game had gone and what I had shot. I never had a good score to report. "What's wrong?" he would ask. "You used to win our priest golf tournaments." "Used to," I would remind him. "Now I just stink." And I did. I had been a fairly decent player at one time and now I was struggling to break 100. "Is it your chipping? Your driving?" he would ask. "No," I would say. "It's everything. I just stink." Regardless of my personal assessment, in a day or two some old golf magazines would appear on the steps leading up to my room, magazines containing tips that might help me. Of course, he could do things like that before someone threw out all his stuff.

Fr. Al cared about his family, his brothers and sisters, his nieces and nephews. Our condolences go out to them. He cared about his classmates and brother priests. Most of all, he cared about serving our Lord and his people. He always looked to do one more thing. All of us here, and all the people he has served in various parishes throughout his long life, have benefited and been blessed because of that.

This past Monday evening, we were picking out the readings and songs for the Mass today. Someone joked that the best song to use was "My Way." Obviously, we couldn't use it for the Mass because it was not a religious song, but it certainly would have been fitting. He believed his way was the best. But there is another song that mentions my way that we could have

used that I didn't think of until too late. The song is "This Day God Gives Me." It is based on the Breastplate of St. Patrick. You would think that a prayer by St. Patrick would mean little to someone of Slovenian descent, but after all these years in Evergreen Park, a little of the old sod must have surely rubbed off on him. The song contains the lyric, "God's way is my way." I think that's what Fr. Al strove for throughout his life. The more that our way and God's way are one, the better disciples we will be. He failed at times as we all do, but he certainly strove to have God's way be his way. Because of that, we believe he will now share in the resurrection. He will share in the life of heaven. He will be united again with family and friends who have gone before him. He's waiting for us to join him, and hopefully, we will.

One of our students asked me over the weekend, "Is Fr. Adamich a saint?" I didn't know what to say, so I said, "Well, if he's in heaven, he's a saint. If he's not there yet, I'm sure it won't be long." As Catholics, we believe in the Communion of Saints. We believe that we are united with all the members of the Church here on earth. We also believe that our union doesn't end with death. We are still united with Fr. Adamich. We can continue to pray for him, and now we can pray to him. It's comforting to know that those big hands of his are still joined in prayer for all of us, that he can intercede for us and still watch over us. In heaven, all our earthly imperfections are removed. I hope, Fr. Al, that you are running around and climbing up and down stairs without worrying about falling, that you are able to see well enough to fly fighter jets for the Air Force, that you're breaking par if they have golf, that you can shovel all the snow you want to, or not, that the squirrels won't eat the tomatoes you plant, that you can have as much salt as you want, that you never run out of Hershey bars or oatmeal cookies, that you have lots of people to play cribbage with, and that you finally know who cleaned out your rooms and threw out all your stuff. Well done, good and faithful servant. May you now share your master's joy.