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## Words of Remembrance Congressman John Joseph Moakley 1927-2001: Saint Brigid Church June 1, 2001

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**Words of  
Remembrance  
Congressman John  
Joseph Moakley  
1927–2001**

**Saint Brigid's  
Church  
June 1, 2001**

*William M. Bulger*

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It is of surpassing significance, isn't it, that Joe was summoned to the joy of eternity on Memorial Day? A day set apart for reflection and tribute in grateful memory of all who have given their lives for the strength and durability of the country we love.

Joe's spirit enlivens Memorial Day for us: patriotism, gratitude, remembrance. Long years of unselfish devotion to bringing the ordinary blessings of compassion to those most needy among us stand as silent sentinels to his inherent goodness, to his desire to make a difference in the quality of life for less fortunate friends and neighbors.

His helping hand was always extended in genuine recognition of the responsibility he believed was his to make things better for those in need of encouragement and inspiration. To him the ideal of brotherhood was not simply something to be preached, but more importantly, he was challenged by his soul to exemplify this ideal in positive advancement of the common good.

Everyone knows the facts of Joseph Moakley's background and career. They are impressive and worth knowing, but they reveal little about the man himself, little of who he was, of what he was, and of why.

He lived his entire life on this peninsula, and it was here, in this place, that his character was shaped. It was, and it still is, a place where roots run deep, where traditions are cherished, a place of strong faith, of strong values, deeply held: commitment to the efficacy of work, to personal courage, to the importance of good reputation — and withal, to an almost fierce sense of loyalty.

No one spent much time talking of such things, but they were inculcated.

And no one absorbed those values more thoroughly than did Joseph Moakley. To understand them is to understand him.

In recent months Joe Moakley would reassure his friends in private conversation that he slept well, ate three meals easily, and was not afraid.

He had a little bit of the spirit of the Irish poet Oliver St. John Gogarty, who said on the subject of death:

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Enough! Why should a man bemoan a fate that  
leads the natural way  
Or think himself a worthier man than those who  
braved it in their day?

If only gladiators died, or heroes, then death would be  
their pride;  
But have not little maidens gone  
and Lesbia's sparrow, all alone?

The virtue of courage was his in abundance. But Joe had, during his lifetime, become the personification of all that was best in his hometown.

And he was a man of memory; he recognized the danger of forgetting what it was to be hungry once we are fed . . . And he would, in a pensive moment, speak of that tendency to forget as a dangerous fault.

Joe exemplified the words of Seneca: "You must live for your neighbor, if you would live for yourself."

And he abided by the words of Leviticus in the Old Testament and St. Matthew in the New Testament: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." These are words that he would have absorbed at home, at St. Monica's, St. Augustine's, and at St. Brigid's.

And Joe brought his competence, dedication, his lofty principle to the public purpose that he saw as most worthwhile. His steady determination in his various public offices, and as a member of Congress, earned him the respect of his colleagues and the confidence of his party's leadership. It also explains the overwhelming support he received from a truly grateful constituency as expressed in their many votes for him, solidifying his position of public responsibility.

His devotion to justice and an imbedded sense of humanity moved him to investigate the Jesuit murders and the ravishing of innocent women in El Salvador. He volunteered for a task most unusual for him. But he, guided by his aide, Jim McGovern, brought to bear his own deep commitment and those old solid working principles that had become a cornerstone in his lifetime quest for fairness and equity. The success of his effort is recognized by all, especially by an appreciative Jesuit community that had suffered from a sense of abandonment.

When I saw how he thought about that particular achievement in his life, it brought to mind the wonderful words of Pericles: "It is by honor, and not by gold, that the helpless end of life is cheered."

Joe, dear friend and neighbor through these many eventful years, we are struck, as we think about it, by your startling contradiction: humility and pride. You were never pompous, seeking the applause of the grandstand. You diligently shunned the glare of the spotlight. You did not expend your energy in search of preening acclaim. You were too self-effacing for that. Humble, indeed.

On the other hand you were a proud, proud person: proud of your religious faith, proud of your family, proud of your South Boston roots and neighborhood, proud to proclaim the ideals that animated your public service — ideals that have been expressed in the unsought torrent of tribute that had flooded the press and airwaves in recent sad days. Humility and pride, seemingly contradictory traits, coalesced in your admirable character, commanding abiding recognition, respect, and, yes, affection.

Joe, the dramatic focus on you during the president's recent appearance before the Congress highlighted your humanity and pride. During the course of his address, our eminent President George Bush paused for a moment to digress. He singled you out, Joe, for special recognition. He described you as a "good man." Whereupon, as you stood in your place, spontaneous bipartisan applause shook the Congress. This episode also reverberated in thrilling dimensions throughout your congressional district. Thank you, President Bush, for this tribute to a good man and for other manifestations of your respect for our Joe and his services to his country.

Joe, you were good enough, as one neighbor to another, to ask me to participate in this liturgy of sacrifice, sorrow, and remembrance. With many another heavy heart it is wrenching to say goodbye. God is with you, I'm sure, Joe, as you now join your beloved Evelyn and your parents in the saintly joy of eternity. We pray He may look favorably on us who lament your loss and who are challenged to follow your example of integrity and justice and useful service.

Fair forward, good friend.✿

