

On behalf myself and Peggy Petersen, John Winkels and the staff and faith community here at Holy Family, I extend to you: Chuck, Ben, Carol, Anita and all your family, our sympathies on the loss of Manuel.

So the Last of the Mohicans has died – the last living sibling of your mother – which means you, Ben and Carol, are now the oldest generation in the family. May you continue to keep the memory of all those who have gone before you alive in the family gatherings that occur in the months and years to come.

Let me continue with a story a person told of his ordeal as a missionary in China.

At the time many years ago, he and his family – his wife, and two children – were under house arrest, although they lived very comfortably.

One day an official from the Chinese government came to them and said, “You can all return to America. But you as a couple, can only take 200 pounds of possessions with you as you leave the country– no more, no less.”

Well, they had been in China for years. So deciding what to take with them that amounted to only 200 pounds, became quite an ordeal.

So they got the scales out, and family arguments began about what just had to be taken and what could be left behind.

After putting things on the scale and taking them off, putting them on and taking them off, they finally got down to 200 pounds of possessions.

The government official came the next day and asked, “Ready to go?” They said yes. He said, “did you weigh everything?” They answered yes.

“Did you weigh the children?” he asked. “Well, no,” they answered. “Aren’t you planning on taking them with you” asked the official? And so most of the 200 pounds of possessions— once thought to be so important – had to be left behind.

The things that can clutter our lives that we think are so important .

Something Manuel enjoyed and did a lot of during his life was to travel. Of course it helps when you work for TWA for 39 years to be able to travel frequently.

I think over the years, Manuel probably became a pretty good packer, deciding what to take on trips and what to leave behind.

But I don't want to get too focused on traveling, because the point I really wish to make is that our life is a journey. From the time we are born, we are traveling toward death and to our true home – which is the kingdom of God.

And we have to be careful that we don't let too many things clutter our lives or separate us from what is really important.

Manuel was a good packer – not just for trips – but for life. For what did he choose as important?

First and foremost – family. Although he never had children of his own – I think it is safe to say that he was a

father figure to many. He certainly loved others with family affection and took delight in honoring them.

Ben, a person I talked to the other night, happened to be in high school with you and that's been quite a while ago – as it has been for me, too.

So all these years later one of the things he remembered was that your uncle was at all of your football games and all your basketball games.

Manuel was the keeper of the family history and knew the connections between who belonged to which branch of the family tree.

Ben would often ask his mother some question about a relative and Genevieve would have to tell him to go ask your uncle.

Manuel could remember everything about anything or anyone, which probably meant the dementia that settled in these last few years and began to rob him of those memories was especially difficult for him.

Although he liked to travel, Manuel was a settled man, in that once he got his place at San Francisco Towers, it's where he stayed the rest of his life until needing the extra care he got at Heritage Village. It allowed him to create a home, which I'm sure became a place of refuge at times when you just needed some time with Unc.

Faith was also one of those things Manuel chose as important in his life. He truly had the belief that one day he would be in the hand of God and no torment would ever touch him again, just as one by one, he watched the members of his family grasp the hand of God and be led home.

It is because of our faith that we gather here today, knowing that Manuel is in a much better place than he is at peace.

For Manuel has left on his final journey, one that has taken him not to some casino in another part of the country or to some foreign land, but to the kingdom of God, where the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear.

Manuel did not care for the cold weather and so would always take off for somewhere warm when it got cold here in Kansas City.

Lest we worry about there only being one warm place waiting for us when we die, I am sure heaven is at the perfect

temperature year round. And that Manuel is now enjoying the warmth of God's love and acceptance.

I began with a story and wish to end with one, a poem called, "*Returning to God.*"

We are born in exile and die there too. As soon as we set sail on the great voyage of life, we begin our return journey.

We spend our lives dreaming of a homeland we have never seen.

Like homing pigeons that are released in a strange country, and know no rest until they return home, so it is with us.

When we die, we do not so much go to God – as return to Him.

Manuel, we pray that you may be happy for all eternity now that you have returned to God. May you anxiously await the arrival of all those you love that you had to leave behind for now. For someday, we, too, will not so much go to God, as return to Him. And like you, be enjoying the warmth of God's love and acceptance.