

Remarks of Ben Novak at the end of Memorial Mass for Michael Novak April 1, 2017

Six weeks ago, Michael Novak died in Washington, DC. Eight days later, there was a beautiful funeral mass to remember Michael Novak, and pray for the repose of his soul.

Today, five weeks later, we are here to do something different. At this mass conducted by Fr. Mayer, we are, of course, remembering Michael and praying for his soul to rest in peace.

*(Ad lib: I am sure, however, that Michael is **not** resting in peace; he is busy introducing Ambassador Novak cocktails to the whole heavenly host.)*

But today is April 1st, and this date was carefully chosen. For at the reception that is soon to follow, I would like to suggest a different theme for the rest of the day. I'd like our celebration today to say—for all the world to hear:

You all thought he was dead. But, April Fool! Michael Novak is still alive and kicking in Ave Maria.

Michael still lives in this community, because he loved this place. He loved the University, he loved the town, he loved the people. And he taught us something very Christ-like—he taught us how to love one another.

Let me be very personal for a moment. I heard Michael first talking about Ave Maria back in 2009. He was excited and enthusiastic.

Then, in 2010, I came down for the wedding of a very good friend, Jaraj Kohutiar's daughter and Rich Dittus's son. Michael wanted me to meet many of the faculty, and see what he saw in them—a real greatness in carrying out Tom Monaghan's dream. It was clear that something very exciting was going on.

Then in the spring of 2011, he invited me to come to help him out, because he had had a couple of operations and needed help getting around. I said yes, primarily because I wanted to see what these enthusiastic people were so enthusiastic about.

A word about myself. I went to Penn State, a university about which my high school principal, upon hearing that I had accepted admission there, exclaimed: "that noble atheistic institution, nestled among the forlorn, God-less hills of central Pennsylvania!" Well, I love Penn State, and will be forever grateful for my experience there.

But I yearned to see something of the Catholic educational experience that my elder brothers had received at Notre Dame, Bennington, Stonehill, and Boston College.

At Tom Monaghan's birthday celebration last week, the emcee read from an article about Catholic colleges: that Ave Maria University was the "most Catholic Catholic college in America."

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I am sure the author of that article got those words from Michael Novak. But I had heard them long before they appeared in print.

Well, in August 2011, I moved down here, and got to know the people that Michael Novak was so excited about. First, I met faculty.

And then I met so many wonderful townspeople who make this place glow with such a bright Catholic light.

And, I met the students.

Michael was right: there truly is a sparkle about this place.

Today, therefore, let us not only remember him, but dedicate ourselves to making sure that his spirit continues—as alive as it ever was—and that it still walks and talks, and smiles and laughs—just as he taught us:

- ✓ still greeting every single person he passes,
- ✓ still stopping to talk to everyone who comes within range of his infectious smile,
- ✓ checking the score of every football, basketball, and baseball game of his favorite teams;
- ✓ talking about Catholic literature, history, politics, or philosophy with every student, professor or townspeople who lends an ear;
- ✓ flirting with every woman he meets—and even with some who just happen to be sitting on the other side of the room;
- ✓ telling every student and professor that he or she is the best student, or the most important professor, and—meaning every word of it. (We soon learned that he said this to everyone, but even when we realize that, we still warm to how wonderful and special he makes us feel.)

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So, I suggest that the theme of the rest of this day shall not be about remembering someone who is dead, but celebrating someone who taught us—*and is still teaching us!*—how to live.

So-o-o, for the rest of this afternoon, let's join together for a meal, catered by the Pub of Ave Maria (you all know how much he loved the Pub).

Let's make this day remembered for many years to come, *as the day Ave Maria resolved to make Michael Novak continue to live among us—as though he could never die—because Ave Maria will never let him die.*

* * *

A word now about organization. When we leave here, I ask you all to gather around the parish hall, where Fr. Mayer will say grace, and Peter Atkinson will teach us a new song, based on Michael Novak's favorite grace by Hillaire Belloc, but added to by Robb Klucik and Peter Atkinson.

Then, let us spread out toward the Pub and Bean—the AVecado—to enjoy the food set out on tables by John, the Pub chef.

As we do, Anna Kunza will sing Michael Novak's favorite song, *Some Enchanted Evening*.

For those with heartier appetites, Carlos Figueroa is serving hot dogs, just in case we run out of finger food.

Sarah Blanchard has made special desserts for us. So, when you've had enough finger food, get thee over to Sarah's table near the Bean to enjoy gourmet desserts.

Bottled water and sodas are free.

The Pub will be serving Michael's famous Ambassador Novak Manhattans, and other alcoholic drinks, at special prices in honor of Michael.

Thirty minutes or so later, after you've gotten a bite to eat, mingled, and greeted everyone around you, the podium will be moved to the center, and we'll hear a raft of great people tell stories about Michael.

You all recall how much Michael loved stories. Well, it will be just like Michael is still here, telling stories. And, believe me, he will especially love these stories—they are about him!!

So, we can all pretend to be Michael Novak listening to what he—and we—most love to hear.

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So, this is what I want today to mean in the history books: This is the day we say to the world: April Fools—Michael Novak is not dead, he still lives in Ave Maria!