

The Florida Catholic

All Editions

Many gather for Terri Schiavo's funeral

By Lois Kindle, Gulfport

On the surface, the Mass seemed much like any other funeral celebration. A procession of eight priests and two deacons were led to the altar, which was covered with lilies and soft accent flowers. A chorus lifted its voice in praise; the faithful were somber, respectful and reflective. Many prayed rosaries. Tears freely flowed.

Theresa Marie Schindler Schiavo was commended to God April 5, as an estimated 700 people packed Most Holy Name of Jesus Catholic Church in Gulfport. Many stood on the sidewalks outside and listened to her funeral service over loudspeaker.

Although many in attendance had never met Terri Schiavo, they were there to support her grieving family. Mary Bonner of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in Dunedin said she was very moved by the ceremony.

"I came just to be with the Schindlers (Bob and Mary, Terri's parents), to give my support and to pray for them," she said, noting she had lost her own 34-year-old son.

Marie Carroll of St. Patrick Parish in Largo agreed. The mother of a 45-year-old mentally handicapped woman, she, too, came in support of the family.

"There are a lot of people who have no hope for the handicapped," she said, adding that her own experience and that of the Schindlers have taught her greater compassion



TFC PHOTO BY ED FOSTER, JR.

and love.

But a strong political undercurrent coursed throughout the more than two-hour ceremony.

The homily, given by Father Frank Pavone, national director of Priests for Life, began with condolences to the family and reassurances to the faithful of life everlasting.

"For so many people, going through this short and confusing life, the human story is birth, life and death," he said. "Beyond that, they cannot see, and beyond that, they have no hope."

But for Christians, he said, the story is life, death and resurrection. They know the grief they feel at the passing of a loved one will be transformed into joy.

"We join with Terri's parents tonight in thanking God for the gift of her life," Father Pavone said. Looking directly at the Schindler's, he then added, "We are with you."

The assembly responded with a standing ovation.

Father Pavone referred to Pope John Paul II's statements regarding the sanctity of life. He said the pope's words firmly conveyed no matter how frail, injured, disabled or weak a person might be, the life itself is always good, because it reflects the glory of God.

The remainder of his message addressed right-to-life issues. Using the words of St. Paul he said, "Death does not have the last word."

"God calls us to go forth from this place to ensure that Terri, who had such difficulty speaking — will speak louder than ever to this world.

"God calls us to go forth from this place so that those who suffered like she did, those who are disabled like she was, may know they are not forgotten, they are not alone, that we love them and will be with them every moment of their lives," he shouted to yet another ovation.

Bobby Schindler, who was visibly shaken, presented one of the eulogies for his sister. He read the letter of someone who had mailed Terri a Purple Heart he had received while serving in the military, which was received on the day she died.

The man, who remained anonymous, was shot in the head in Vietnam in 1965. "The innocent must suffer so the guilty can be punished," he said. Once more, the crowd stood in applause.

Members of the media get a final glimpse into the saga of Terri Schindler - Schiavo as they record a memorial Mass for the 41-year-old woman who unwittingly became a worldwide celebrity for right-to-life causes of disabled persons.

Terri's sister, Suzanne Vitadamo, spoke of her love for her brother, parents, and Terri.

Looking at her mother, she said softly, "You are the one I ache for the most. I'm so sorry your Terri is no longer with you."

While the Schindler's wanted media coverage, they insisted the press be confined to an area away from the church. Neither was it permitted inside Maria Center, where two public receptions were held. The parish wanted to maintain the decorum of the ceremony and protect the family's wishes.

"Sometimes grief has to happen away from the lens of the media," said Father Bill Svengros, pastor. "They (Bob and Mary Schindler) are remarkable people. They have great faith in the Lord and certain hope in the resurrection. When I talk with them, there's no sign of any sort of bitterness or rancor, but one of really a humble trust in the Lord."

[Back to Top](#)

Copyright © 1996-2005 *The Florida Catholic* Newspaper - All Rights Reserved
498 S. Lake Destiny Road, Orlando, FL 32810
Phone: (407) 660-9141 • Fax: (407) 660-2977 • Toll-Free: 1-888-275-9953