Good morning. My name is Ken Gormley and I’m privileged to serve as the Dean of Duquesne Law School. More importantly – like many of you in this church which is the home parish of Duquesne University – I’m privileged to have been helped along the way, at every stage of my career, by Dr. John Murray.

I first met “Dean Murray” in 1982 when he was presiding over Pitt Law School, and I was applying to start up a new Legal Writing program there. I hand-wrote a 10-page letter, explaining why I was the best possible person in the world for this job. I was ushered into John’s office -- he leaned back in his chair, puffed on a cigarette, and said with that perfect Murray-delivery: “I don’t think I have the time to read another 10-page letter, so I guess I’ll just have to hire you and be done with it.”
And he never told me how to do my job – except to ask how HE could help by writing extra problems and meeting with my students after hours. He was the busiest person in the Law School. But he was the FIRST to carve out time for others.

When I came to Duquesne Law School in 1994, a big reason was John Murray. He was President, by then, the first lay President in the University’s history – he was busy turning it into a world-class institution. I worked on many big programs with John during those days. Seeing him in action was incredible: He thrived on innovation, being adventurous, taking carefully calculated risks – and then turning them into brilliant successes.

I’ll never forget the night that he presided over the Celebration for Excellence in December of 1999. The new Student Union had recently been unveiled and it was glittering on that night. All 3,000 guests followed John outside, bedecked in his handsome black winter coat. He and Liz stood together in the cold, and he raised his hand in the air,
as if to say “Behold…” And all of a sudden, fireworks started shooting into the sky from the South Side – a spectacular production by the Zambelli family – and everyone in the crowd just gasped, as if to say:

“My God, this guy can make fireworks shoot into the sky and gorgeous new Student Unions appear on the Bluff – what can’t he do?”

There was a story circulating around campus at this time – and Fr. Hogan, you can tell me if it was apocryphal. The story was that someone proposed that John donate money for a sepulcher, so that he could be buried in it, atop the Duquesne chapel, when he passed away. John asked how much a sepulcher like this would cost. The answer was, “about a hundred thousand dollars.” And John said:

“Well, that would be a waste of money. I’d only need it for three days.”

Now, Bishop Zubik -- I don’t believe that story. John was actually much more humble – and even shy – than most people knew. But he
was certainly a transformative President, who seemed to be able to touch things and turn them into gold. Any complete story of the modern era of Duquesne University will certainly record that John Murray was a principal architect of it.

On a more personal note, I have to tell you that when President Dougherty appointed me Interim Dean in 2008, it was a tough time for the Law School. Internal problems were crippling us. John Murray was Chancellor by now, occupying an office right down the hall from me in the Law School. Most people in his position would have said: “I don’t need more of this aggravation – I’ve been dean at law two schools. President of a University. I’ll sit in my office and be a comfortable, revered figurehead.” Not John Murray. He was my closest supporter and advisor during this difficult time…. and that remained true all the way through last week. We’d sit for hours in his office, talking about his experiences at Pitt, or Villanova, or as President of Duquesne; and I’d learn from those experiences; and
somehow I’d draw strength from his calm, confident, thoroughly-honest approach.

[He never looked at issues through a traditional lens. He’d turn that lens, ever so slightly, and create a new point of view that was so intense and brilliant I’d walk out of his office and just say, “Wow!”

Somehow -- after those meetings -- the right answer seemed to reveal itself.]

John often said to me that he wanted to stop teaching when he “lost his fastball.” I saw him two days before he died, and I can tell you – he never lost his fastball. He was literally the best teacher in the building. He was also the most youthful person on our faculty, I often told my wife Laura. It was very difficult for me to come to grips with it, on the day he passed away – but I gradually found consolation in the fact that John never really had a bad day. In fact, he seemed to love his job MORE, every day. He was devoted to his students, who were the number-one reason he came to work for fifty-plus years. [I
can’t count the number of people at the funeral home yesterday who said, “This was the best professor I ever had in my life.]

To my knowledge, he never missed a single day of classes in fifty years – in fact, he had Marjorie’s son, Matt, call me as he was being taken to the hospital last week, to make sure his classes were covered in Contracts and Remedies. Another love (of course) was his scholarship – Murray on Contracts, the revised Corbin book, the hundred other projects he was always working on -- starting his writing at 5:00 in the morning, so he could work in quiet at his desk at home.

Most of all, though, John loved his family beyond words – and I can tell you that he talked about each one of you with such pride – his children, his grandchildren, Liz, Marge, the extended family. It was hard to fathom how anyone did it, but John somehow seemed to grow happier each day....

In fact, the last time I say him walking to his class -- last week -- he was wearing a snazzy blue blazer, his Contracts book and seating chart
tucked under his arm, and he was smiling that supremely-confident
John Murray smile, as if to say: “Every day is perfect, as long as I get
to do this.”

I’ll miss the long talks in his office, and calling over the weekend to
kibbitz about new projects. I’ll miss being in the presence of this great
academic leader and civic figure, who was capable of doing a hundred
things to perfection – but who devoted most of his career to
Duquesne University of the Holy Spirit, because he loved this place,
and he truly believed that his principal purpose in life was to serve
God by serving his students.

We’ll miss you, John. But we were all blessed to have you as a
friend, teacher and mentor. And to the extent that God needs
someone to stand at the gates of heaven to iron out the complex
terms of entry – the inevitable contractual issues of offer,
acceptance, promissory estoppel and the ultimate Battle of the Forms
– He now has the perfect man.
May you rest in peace... and shine a light down on all of us who were privileged to be in your midst.