

Happy 85th Birthday Fr. Bob

(The following were published in the December, 2005 issue of the *Maine Encounter Spirit*.)

Dear Father Bob, HAPPY BIRTHDAY and Congratulations on your 85th! Your most endearing quality is your unconditional love for married couples and their Sacrament. Your praise and high expectations constantly challenge us to be more for each other and those around us. Another quality is your generosity—generosity of time and the giving of yourself to others—particularly the Marriage Encounter Community. Is there anyone who has logged more miles, given more Weekends, loved more couples, than our Father Bob? Impossible. Your love of God and Church are reflected in the gentle, caring ways you interact with all you meet. We cherish the many times you've called from the highway—on your way to or from a Weekend—just to say, "I love you." You have been a blessing to us and a delight to know.

We love you. **Jack & Dee Drake**, Kennebunkport, ME

Father Bob McDonald is a true inspiration to us all. His devotion, his passion for couples and their Sacrament of Marriage is totally awesome and noteworthy. It is very hard to find priests who have dedicated their lives, as Father Bob has to help us married couples. His love and support for us, we are sure is very special in God's eyes and in ours. We have truly been blessed to know Father Bob McDonald. Happy Birthday Man of God. Thank you for all you have done and do for the Sacrament of Marriage!!!

Ed & Gloria Thibodeau, Orland, ME

Dear Father Bob, can't believe you will be turning 85. We pray we have your energy when we reach that age. You have been such a gift to our Church and have touched the lives of hundreds maybe even thousands. You certainly have touched our lives. Marriage Encounter has been blessed with the special way you love our couples. Your energy infects others and we all need it. Your dedication to the movement through the years has brought much respect and honor not only for you but the whole Church. Even though we never presented a Weekend with you we have felt your love and sensitivity. We wish you much joy on your birthday and many more happy trails ahead.

Much love and respect, **Steve & Rosemary Trettel**, Milford, MA

Fran and I met Fr. Bob in 1982 at a sweep and he has been a constant in our lives ever since. When we see him, we marvel together that our 23 year-old daughter was an infant in arms at that first meeting. He asks, "How's the baby?" After knowing Bob for many years, in the mid-1990's we presented a Vermont Weekend with him in Rutland, Vermont. We learned about his gentleness and sensitivity. He carried a portable typewriter and was revising his talks on Friday afternoon. Talk about current talks! From 1990 until 2005, Fr. Bob has presented numerous Weekends in Vermont. He has been a rock to us and we always knew that if we needed a priest, he would always come running. That makes him dedicated. We will really be blessed if we can be as active and alive at 85 as Bob is. God bless you, Father Bob.

Love, **Dave & Fran Mount**, Burlington, VT

Dear Fr. Bob, Your most endearing quality has always been your undying dedication to WWME. We remember with such great fondness the warm hugs and the sincerity with which you always shared yourself with us. Thanks for being our friend for all these years!

We love you. **Lee & Jan Kremer**, Algonquin, IL

Fr. Bob means so much to us both as a couple and as presenting team in NH. We have done many Weekends with him and his love for the couples and the World Wide Marriage Encounter movement never ceases to impress and inspire us. We see the sparkle in his eyes as he presents his talks and we witness how each couple is drawn to him when he pauses and looks each of them in the eye to make sure they don't miss his point. We love the laughter and joy that bubbles up and spills from him when he is with couples on the Weekend. It is incredible to think that he has been doing this for 25 years and it is proof positive that one person truly can change the world. We love you Fr. Bob.

Mike & Deb McQuillen, Bristol , NH

Fr. Bob has so many endearing qualities.. The one that comes to mind first is his compassion. So many times over the years that Chris & I were blessed to have known Fr. Bob, he has shown his love and concern for us. I can't count the times on all my fingers and toes. He is always non-judgmental when listening to our concerns. His Christ-like quality of compassion for all is so evident. Thank you Fr. Bob for being such a special part of my life.

Sincerely, **Luanne Crinion**, Brunswick, ME

Dear Bob, Congratulations and Happy Birthday! As soon as I heard that you were celebrating your Birthday I thought of the many times you made me feel so welcome when you would greet me. I also treasure your ability to reach couples on Weekends and otherwise. I know of no one who is more dedicated to our movement. I am keeping you in prayer. I hope you are well. I am still giving Weekends but various illnesses are keeping me from doing much more. I am with you in Spirit on your Birthday.

Fr. Leo Cummings, OMI, Smyrna, GA

Dear Fr. Bob, HAPPY BIRTHDAY! You have been a positive presence in our life for 25 years. We were blessed to have you say Mass at our home in Wells on our 30th surprise anniversary celebration. We have enjoyed your gifts on a few bus rides to National or Regional Meetings, and your Christmas visits to our Circle in Kennebunk. You share so much of your love and spirit. We gain strength and renewed focus on our ME commitment to each other when we read your letters in the *Encounter Spirit*.

With love and prayers, **Mary Joan & Jack Merry**, Cape Elizabeth, ME

Fr. Bob McDonald has always been a joy to be with. I've been with Fr. Bob at conventions, section meetings, National Priests' Experiences and enrichments over the years. He always has kind words of encouragement for me, along with a great smile. When it comes to giving Weekends, he is willing to travel almost anywhere to make sure a Weekend is a "go." I wish I had the stamina he's had for everything Marriage Encounter. Happy Birthday, and may you return to the trail as soon as possible. There are more roads to travel.

Happy 85th! **Fr. Tom Griffith, SVD**, Duxbury, MA

Father Bob is a gift from God. We believe he chose the right vocation when he heard the call. We met him in February 1988 on our original Worldwide Marriage Encounter Weekend in Winslow, Maine. Like many of you reading this, on the Friday night of the Weekend we had no idea what was to come. What we did know was that this wonderful genuine priest would be with us all weekend. On Saturday morning at Mass he celebrated with such sincerity and joy. We knew that being a priest was what he wanted and being with us was where he wanted to be by his honesty with us all. During Mass he asked for all of us to please forgive our Church for any wrongs that had been committed in her name. At that moment we saw his compassion and were grateful for this prayer. Our relationship with him has continued. At a meeting in Maine one time I, Kathy, was sharing and began by saying "*for this Unit.*" I, Bill, could not believe Kathy had called us a unit and gave her a strange look. Father Bob laughed right out loud and from then on has called us *The Unit*. We love that he lovingly teases us with this as we know his abhorrence for labels. We have been blessed to present Weekends with him in Maine and North Carolina and hug him at the conventions. We try to keep our dialogue daily and sharp as we never know when a note or call will come from Father Bob with the challenging question "How's your dialogue?" We are honored to have the opportunity on this birthday to share our thoughts with many. Father Bob was our first Worldwide Marriage Encounter priest and he set the bar very high. His love for all of us goes on and on and is like a warm snuggly Hudson Bay wool blanket on a cold winter's night. God is great in you Father Bob. We love you and Happy Birthday.

The Unit, **Bill and Kathy Thurnau**, Batesville, MS

Father Mac has been instrumental to us in our everyday lives by the example that he sets. He is genuine, truthful and sincere in the message that he shares from his heart. God truly gave Marriage Encounter the best when he blessed us with Father Mac. Thank you Lord! Happy Birthday Father Mac.

Love, **Don & Cindy Blanchette**, Woodland, ME

Happy Birthday Fr. Bob! How blessed the earth was 85 years ago when you were born. Since we have known you, and many years before, countless couples have been blessed by your faith, joy and passion for Marriage Encounter, including ourselves. You have touched many lives with your humor, honesty and desire for the Sacrament of Marriage and its value to the growth of the Church. When we are able to be with you or receive your emails we are lifted up and filled with joy. You are a lighthouse that draws us near and guides us with your light. We love you and wish you the happiest of days.

Robert & Cheryl Amber, Baileyville, ME

Dear Fr. Bob, It's hard to believe the ***Energizer Bunny*** is 85 years old! You have touched so many people over the years and have taught us so much. Your love of life, your humility, your honesty about who you are – all qualities that Jesus had on earth. We remember how you used to carry your sleeping bag in your car trunk (you probably still do), in case you got too sleepy from one of your many trips. You would even sleep on the grass on the side of the turnpike. You always wanted to be part of any Marriage Encounter meeting, baby's Baptism, family or friend's birthday, a couple's anniversary etc. Being a part of anyone's life is a life-giving event to you. We still talk about you to our ME Community in Tennessee and to our RCIA class. You are a wonderful example of what a priest should be. You are human, lovable and humble. You take a personal interest in your people. You encourage couples to live passionately. Just last night, when we were helping to host a ME Weekend in Nashville, as usual we joined in a circle with the team to pray before the Weekend started. Then we all did the "Yeah, God!" cheer and we thought of you. You always gave the **best** "Yeah, God" cheer!

Lots of love to you on your birthday and always, **Joeileen Walker**, Dickson, TN

Fr. Bob McDonald, S.M. is one of the only priests who sends regular articles to ***eMatrimony***. For this alone we commend him. But, we have also had the opportunity to serve in WWME with Fr. Bob and we are personally aware of his enthusiasm and commitment to his Sacrament and particularly to Worldwide Marriage Encounter. Fr. Bob has more passion and conviction than many men half his age. His willingness to serve others whole-heartedly is a call to all of us to live our lives with more purpose and direction. Happy Birthday Fr. Bob. We wish **Fr. John McCluskey** was with us now to extend our best wishes to you. We have faith that Fr. McCluskey is celebrating with you from heaven.

Love & Prayers, **Jack & Karen Baker**, Bellevue, WA