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## *I've Been on a Boat*

### **A Homily for the Thanksgiving and Celebration for the life of Graham Harden Mulling by the Rev. Canon George Maxwell**

Thank you, Chuck, for sharing Graham's story with us.

It was beautiful and we could feel the presence of God in it.

There was a time, near the end, when Graham was kept asleep so that he could tolerate the medication that had been prescribed for him.

When he finally woke up, Chuck told him he had been asleep in his hospital bed.

Graham said, "Oh no. I've been on a boat."

For several weeks, everyone who loved Graham watched a small, still body in a hospital bed. And Graham was somewhere else.

I don't know where he went. But I believe him.

Graham's grandfather says the lesson Graham leaves all of us is his good humor and his strength. He has pictures, dozens of them, and in almost every one Graham is smiling, with his thumb in the air. At the ballpark. On the beach. In the hospital bed, in the middle of treatment.

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Blessed are the pure in heart, Jesus says, for they shall see God.

Pure in heart does not mean perfect. It means whole. Undivided.

A boy who hugs you with both arms and then pats you on the back, as if he is the one comforting you. A boy giving a thumbs up from a hospital bed.

Chuck said he thinks Graham knew we needed it. I think so too. Graham was keeping watch over the people keeping watch over him.

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I believe that whenever we are lifted up, even for a moment, by innocence, or love, or beauty, we have seen God. Not just something good. God.

You could see that in Graham.

And where you have seen God once, you will see God again.

Chuck said that for a moment he will look out at Graham's soccer field expecting to see that blonde hair among the other children. He won't see Graham there. But he will see what he saw in Graham. Children playing. Friends showing up. Love that keeps coming.

It won't be a replacement. Nothing replaces Graham. But it will be the same light. God is still where God was.

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Logan and Chuck, I want to say something to you.

Chuck told us what Logan did. Houston. Months away from the two boys she loved, so that Graham would never face it without his mother. Every treatment, every setback, every small victory. Chuck called her the silent hero of Graham's story, and he is right.

But predictably, Chuck didn't tell us as much about what he did. We can all imagine. Life continued in Atlanta while Logan and Graham were in Houston.

There was a moment, though, when I think Chuck's character was particularly recognizable. Chuck mentioned that there was a time when Graham's treatment meant leaving Atlanta and moving to Houston. He didn't mention how Graham got there. It didn't just happen. When the news here was as hard a news can be, Chuck did what Chuck does. He got on the phone, found a doctor in Houston willing to treat Graham and a way to get Graham, who by that time couldn't fly commercial, there.

I remember the day you made your wedding vows to each other. We prayed that each of you would be to the other a strength in need, a counselor in perplexity, a comfort in sorrow, and a companion in joy. None of us knew then what that prayer would ask of you. We couldn't have imagined you being faced with so many decisions that no parent should ever have to make ... for three years. You have lived every word of that prayer.

Grief can pull people apart.

In a few minutes we will pray that this sorrow draws you together and does not tear you apart.

We will pray it because we love you, and because we have already watched you do it.

We saw God in Graham. We have also seen God in the two of you.

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Chuck said that your job now is to carry Graham's memory. It is. And you already know how to carry. But you will not carry it alone.

When the beams for this chapel were being signed in Child Hall, Carl and Marie wrote Graham's name on one of them.

He is up there, above us, in the roof of this room. This room is holding him today. So is God. And so is God holding you.

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Before we leave today, we will sing an old hymn. Its last verse says, "And when from death I'm free, I'll sing on."

Graham had the sweetest voice.

His life is changed, not ended. We have lost him from our sight, but he is not done. He is still on a boat, going on into God."

And I believe he is singing.

Amen.