

Homily Opening School Picnic August 13, 2017

1KGS 19: 9A, 11-13A, PS 85, Rom 9: 1-5, MT 14: 22-33

All summer long, it's been hard to drive onto campus without first noticing the construction progress on the David "DJ" Sokol Learning for Life building. Even for some of us who live here on campus, the urge to inspect has been hard to resist. The new building is exciting.

It also, I suspect, brings to mind many questions for students, faculty, and staff. What will my classroom look like? How will it affect learning? Just how long will it take to get from one class to the other? What will it be like in the winter? Will we have enough money for all of it? If I have fifth period class in the new building, how long will it take me to get to lunch? You know you're worried about that—complain all you want about the food, but all you all run to lunch. You know you do.

I'd like to focus on one very important question today that I suspect very few of us really know the answer to—Just who was David "DJ" Sokol, and why is there a building being named after him? I suspect that like me, a majority of you here never met DJ. Aside from several of the older monks and a select few of the faculty there aren't too many people here at Mount Michael with personal memories of him.

I can tell you some facts about him. He was born May 29, 1981. His parents are David and Peggy Sokol. He has an older sister named Kelly. He entered Mount Michael as a freshman in the fall of 1995. His classmates called him David; to family he was known as DJ. When he was 15, he was diagnosed with Hodgkin's disease. He was student body president his senior year. And he graduated from Mount Michael in 1999.

Facts are helpful. But as much as we seem to like them in our contemporary world, facts don't always give us a complete picture of a person. We don't get the essence of DJ and why he deserves to have his name on that building. In philosophy, if we want to get at the essence of something we can employ a method known as the *via negativa* and approach the subject by looking at what it isn't. DJ wasn't a great doctor known for finding a cure for a disease. He wasn't a great lawyer defending the rights of others, nor was he an exceptional business man or politician. He didn't make a name for himself by excelling at sports and becoming a pro athlete. He wasn't a Rockstar musician or a famous actor. And he certainly wasn't simply internet famous for being whatever makes people internet famous....He never had the opportunity to pursue any of those things. He died June 11, 1999 shortly after graduating from Mount Michael

So there you have it. He was a student at Mount Michael who graduated and then died after battling cancer for two and half years. But for all the monks, the faculty who knew him in class, for his family, and for his classmates and friends it is altogether fitting that his name is on that building being constructed over there. Why? I believe because they recognize that while DJ was alive he lived what is considered by some to be the first of three levels of vocation. DJ exemplified in his life and in his dying that most basic level of vocation that we all have—the Universal Call to Holiness as it was named at the second Vatican Council. We are, all of us, called to be holy as the Lord our God is holy. It is the universal call that we all receive, yet we each receive it in a truly individual way. And that's what DJ did and the reason it makes sense that his name is on that building. He was holy.

Now don't get me wrong, he was holy—not perfect. No one who knew him would say he was the perfect student, son, brother, friend or classmate. Nobody is perfect. And DJ had his imperfections and failures, but they were his. Unique to him, just as all his gifts of spirit were

his as well. He never tried to be anyone but who his was created to be. And that's what answering that call to holiness is all about—living into the image of God you were created to show to the world.

New students, you will soon learn that we have a few things we do as a school that may be different from other schools. One of them is that at the beginning of every week, we gather as a learning community in the chapel for a reflection on one of the Benedictine values. After the reflection, we pray our vocation prayer. I suggest this year, that when we pray that prayer we also make a remembrance of DJ and ask him to go with Archangel Michael and intercede for us before the throne of God. We need all the help we can get. And I can't think of a better person to ask than DJ because he lived his vocation—his call to holiness.

And that's the challenge we all have, but I'd like to especially challenge all you students here. Do it now. Live this year—as a freshman, sophomore, junior, or senior—whatever you are—live this year worthy of having a building named after you.