

**BISHOP AUSTIN VAUGHAN, RIP**  
**A TRUE FRIEND OF OUR LORD AND OUR LADY**

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The death of Bishop Austin Vaughan provides that rare and delightful opportunity to reflect on the life of a truly humble and courageous bishop, a man who spoke the truth plainly and without fear of human respect. Bishop Vaughan was the sort of man who lived in the tradition of St. John Fisher, unafraid to run afoul of the powerful, unafraid to put his own person and liberty on the line in order to bear witness to the fact that each abortion is a mystical attack against our Lord Himself in the person of an unborn child. His fearlessness in the face of the police brutality visited upon him when he was arrested during various rescues in the 1980s and early 1990s brought more than a handful of evangelical and fundamentalist Protestants into the Catholic faith. Bishop Vaughan took to heart the words of our Lord: "Fear not him who can destroy the body. Fear him who can destroy both body and soul-and throw both into Gehenna."

What struck everyone who knew Bishop Vaughan was his kindness and his humility. He was invariably Christ-like with everyone he met: patient, kind, and solicitous. He was also a most humble man, so humble that he never called attention to himself. Indeed, a high-ranking prelate in the archdiocese of New York told me in 1984 that Bishop Vaughan had been Terence Cardinal Cooke's personal choice to succeed him as the archbishop of New York. This priest said that the Holy Father did indeed offer the position to Bishop Vaughan, who humbly demurred, saying that he would not be a good administrator. This was from a man who was an excellent rector of St. Joseph's Seminary in Yonkers, New York, during the 1970s (many priests persevered in their vocations because of his own priestly example of manly courage and prayerfulness, especially his Eucharistic piety and deep devotion to our Lady's Most Holy Rosary). Bishop Vaughan was content to be the vicar of Dutchess County, where he was able to pastor souls in imitation of the Good Shepherd Himself.

Humble though he was, however, Bishop Vaughan was also a man of abiding courage. Without any degree of bitterness or sarcasm, he would use his interventions during the annual meeting of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops to stand four-square in behalf of doctrinal orthodoxy and

liturgical reverence. He was a thorn in the side of those intent on making the Mass their ideological plaything. At a time in 1979 when the bishops and the International Committee for English in the Liturgy were pushing for all types of “gender neutral language,” Bishop Vaughan reminded his brother bishops that there were over 1,100 errors in translation from the Latin *Missale Romanum* of Pope Paul VI found in the English Sacramentary. Many of his brother bishops just gnashed their teeth as he quietly and calmly spelled out how the faith was being eviscerated by real revolutionaries.

Bishop Vaughan was also unimpressed with those who held civil power. Ten years ago, he warned then-Governor of New York Mario Cuomo that he (the governor) was risking Hell for his support of the killing of unborn children. Typically, Cuomo distorted what Vaughan had said to him, saying that the kindly, gentle bishop was “damning” him to Hell. Cuomo’s demagoguery just rolled right off Bishop Vaughan’s very strong back. He had not “damned” Governor Cuomo to Hell; he was merely warning the governor of what might happen if he persisted in his promotion of abject evil.

I met Bishop Vaughan in 1974 when he was rector of St. Joseph’s Seminary. At the time I was a doctoral student at the State University of New York at Albany, and I had driven to Yonkers from the state capital to discuss with him the possibility of my studying for the priesthood for the archdiocese of New York. His kindness struck me immediately. It struck me whenever I saw him over the next twenty years, whether at pro-life Masses he celebrated or at the Cardinal Cooke Guild luncheon in 1994 (the last time I saw him in person). His words of encouragement to me for my work was something that touched me very much. They are something I will always treasure.

Bishop Vaughan offered up for the needs of the Church and the world the incapacity and suffering that were the result of a serious stroke he had endured, especially for the cause of the unborn and their mothers. While we pray for the repose of his soul, we should know that he was a man in the mold of Ignatius Cardinal Kung, i.e., a man whose cause for canonization will no doubt be introduced before too long. For Bishop Vaughan was everything that a bishop should be: kind to individual sinners, but ever firm and courageous in defending and articulating the truths of the holy faith.

Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord. And let perpetual light shine upon him. My his soul-and all the souls of the faithful departed-rest in peace. Amen.

# PART I • SYMPOSIA

