

Protopresbyter Rastko Trbuhovich and I entered St. Vladimir's Seminary in the mid-1960s after high school graduation, in what was then the seminary's "Pre-The" program. Both of our fathers were priests (his in the Serbian Church, mine, the Romanian) and so we immediately had something in common. In time, his future Protinica Victoria (Evanoff) joined us as a fellow student.

Father Rastko was serious about the faith and was clear in defending its teachings and practice, but was never rigidly judgmental of people. He enjoyed and was able to interact lovingly with people of all ages. He could laugh and have a good time. (Standing too close to a candle stand, his brand new jacket caught fire but, as always, he saw no reason at all for even the slightest concern or for interrupting the service! You might say he was oblivious to matters of the world.)

We sang in the choir together, and he, coming from a wonderfully gifted musical family and having perfect pitch, directed the second Octet I was asked to join. Vickie was my wife Anita's godmother when she entered the Orthodox Church. We were in each other's weddings, and they honored us by being the godparents of our children.

In Lackawanna, New York, where Father served, there is a renowned basilica, an architectural monument. But in recent years, with Fr. Rastko's guidance, modest St. Stephen Serbian Orthodox Church has become a jewel box of Orthodox iconography, a legacy he left the parish and community to cherish, a sermon he will continue to preach for generations.

Above all, I'll remember my brother for a particular expression he used in virtually every situation. Whenever you asked how he was he automatically responded, "Thank God." When he was injured in a traffic accident and Vickie was airlifted to the hospital, his immediate and only reaction was "Thank God" (that they were spared). After cardiac hospitalization, "Thank God." After brain surgery, "Thank God." Always, "Thank God!"

It wasn't just a habit. He saw everything, good, bad, serious or joyful, as a reason to "Thank God," and of course he was right. We need to thank God for all things at all times.

He was a living and beautiful example of a grateful son (to his late priest-father and a now heart-broken mother), a good brother, a wonderful husband to the help-mate with whom he shared his pastoral ministry, an amazingly loving father to Sarah and Basil and grandfather to Tess and Nathan, and a truly humble priest, faithful to His Lord to the end; who realized in his most sincere heart that there is no more appropriate, meaningful, fulfilling, all-encompassing response to life in Christ, than "Thank God."

For Rastko, my brother priest, 'Bračo', godfather to my children, I now say, "Thank God." May the angels carry you to the eternal Paradise, dear friend.

-The Very Reverend Laurence Lazar