

I wish I could be with you tonight.. But my oldest grandchild's bar mitzvah in Massachusetts is today. I'm sure Ralph would understand why I am there instead of here. I'm grateful for the opportunity to share these thoughts with you.

I joined the faculty in 1977, and for a while I felt a bit like a "stranger in a strange land," doing my best to learn who was who. It wasn't long before I knew who Ralph was—he was like a redwood tree—he'd been at the school seemingly forever: tall, powerful, nurturing, universally held in such high esteem by everybody, yet completely approachable and down-to-earth. One of the community jokes was that no one had ever once seen him wear a necktie—an exaggeration, probably, but still, a treasured part of the school's folklore.

For years, we dreamed of getting out of Leahy Hall and into a modern law building, but nothing much happened--until Ralph agreed to become our dean. if anyone could command the respect and support and love of people at the university, the faculty and our alumni, it was him.

And, of course, we all wondered whether, once he became dean, Ralph would finally break down and wear a tie!

At his first faculty meeting as dean, he did wear a tie—in the shape of a fish. It reassured us—not that we really needed reassuring—"Hey, I'm dean for a while, but I'm still just Ralph."

And here we are, in this beautiful and wonderfully functional home.

It's easy to say that our building is his monument, and there's some truth to that, but it only tells a small part of what Ralph contributed to the law school. He fostered and personified decency and compassion, loyalty and strength. Like each of the nine other deans under whom I served on this faculty, Ralph insisted that this school was both proudly Catholic and proudly inclusive and supportive of all religions--and that dedication to inclusion was not an "add-on," it was an essential part of being a Catholic institution.

I benefitted personally from Ralph's dedication to that ideal. Shortly after our building was complete, an editorial appeared in the student newspaper in essence accusing Harvey Zuckman and me of trying to "usurp" the school's Catholic identity. Ralph said nothing publicly, but two weeks later, when we had the celebratory dinner dedicating the building, Ralph asked me to compose and lead the prayer in which we

asked God to bless this building and all those who worked, taught and studied here. I was enormously proud and grateful. It is one of the highlights of my 42-plus years at the school.

Because this is a memorial service for Ralph, I'd like to share some thoughts about Jewish memorial practices.

At set points in each prayer service, Jews who are mourning the death or observing the anniversary of the death of a loved one rise and recite a prayer called the Mourner's Kaddish. The prayer makes no reference, direct or indirect, to death or mourning; it is, rather, a prayer praising God's greatness and power and goodness. So why is it associated with death and mourning? No one really knows, but one theory is that when people who are mourning stand and praise God, they are in fact

consoling

a fellow mourner who is among them, though not visibly present:

God Himself.

When mourners recite the Kaddish, they are consoling God, who is mourning the loss of one of the people He relied on to make this a better world. In essence, they are saying: "God, despite Your loss, we know You are great and good; and we know it is our responsibility, in our own way, to fill the vacancy."

Another memorial prayer is said individually, not collectively, in which the mourner pledges that the deceased's memory "will endure as inspiration for commitment to his ideals and integrity in our lives."

Everyone who knew Ralph was blessed to know him and work with him. If his memory inspires us to renewed commitment to his ideals and integrity, all those who follow us here will be truly blessed as well.