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Archbishop Jose Gomez holds a red book over a casket draped in white. Many lay people and

Los Angeles Archbishop José H. Gomez places the Book of Gospels on the casket of Los Angeles Auxiliary Bishop David G. O'Connell during his funeral Mass at the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels March 3, 2023. O'Connell was fatally shot at his home in Hacienda Heights Feb. 18. (OSV News photo/Sarah Yaklic, courtesy Archdiocese of Los Angeles)

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Los Angeles — March 6, 2023

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Los Angeles Auxiliary Bishop David G. O'Connell was remembered as a man "gripped by grace" and "at ease with movers and shakers and also with the moved and

shaken" as nearly 5,000 attended a funeral Mass at the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels March 3.

The Mass was the conclusion of a three-day tribute to O'Connell, starting with a March 1 memorial Mass at St. John Vianney Church in Hacienda Heights. On March 2 at the cathedral, local Catholics said farewell to O'Connell in an all-day public viewing followed by a vigil Mass.

In his homily at the funeral Mass, Msgr. Jarlath Cunnane, O'Connell's classmate and close friend from their seminary days in Ireland in 1971, called upon the phrase "Anam Cara," the Celtic concept of having a friend of the soul.

"You're blessed if you have a soul friend," said Cunnane, the pastor of St. Cornelius Church in Long Beach. "And I was blessed to have David. … I was better for having known David O'Connell. Many of you were too, were you not?"

The question drew a round of applause from the pews.

Los Angeles Archbishop José H. Gomez presided over the Mass that not only filled the cathedral pews but had hundreds more standing in the aisles, ambulatories and seated on the outside plaza watching a livestream presentation.

Long, yellow school buses frequently pulled up to the curb outside the cathedral to drop off more mourners. Several streamed into the Cathedral Plaza as the two-hour Mass went on, using umbrellas as shade, clutching their young children, simply wanting to be present.

Three cardinals -- Roger M. Mahony, Blase J. Cupich of Chicago and Robert W. McElroy of San Diego -- attended as well as 34 bishops and more than 50 priests at the altar.

Local dignitaries included LA Police Chief Michel Moore, former Los Angeles mayors Eric Garcetti and Jim Hahn, former LA County Sheriff Jim McDonnell, LA County Supervisor Janice Hahn, LA District Attorney George Gascón and several other civic leaders who called O'Connell a friend over the years.

Cunnane noted that O'Connell "wasn't just my good friend. Friendship is something he was good at. He has friends young and old, far and wide … he has friends up and down the social scale, at ease in the corridors of power and with the powerless."

In calling him a man "gripped by grace," Cunnane said O'Connell was "seized by the Lord, like Jeremiah (who) said: 'Lord, you seduced me, and I let myself be seduced; you were stronger and you triumphed.'"

"A mind and a wit always quick and sharp, but sometimes in earlier days, with an edge, by grace became levity and joyous humor, and (an) ability to affirm," the priest added. "He was always affirming, he found the good in people and praised it. He spoke it into them."

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Cunnane thanked O'Connell's family members present, several who came from Ireland, "for giving us the blessing of him for all these years and all this wonderful ministry here in Los Angeles."

Gomez read a message from Pope Francis that concluded: "To those gathered for the Mass of Christian Burial and to all who mourn Bishop O'Connell's loss in the sure hope of the Resurrection, the Holy Father cordially imparts his blessing as a pledge of peace and consolation in the Lord.

The archbishop added: "As we know, Bishop Dave loved and served Jesus with all his heart and all his strength, and like Jesus, he loved his brothers and sisters ‘to the end,' with a special love for those who are often forgotten and those who live on society's margins. … We continue to pray for his eternal repose and especially we know that he has received the eternal reward. He's in heaven. So, let's keep praying for him, for his family, and for all of us. And let's start going to his intercession for our needs."

An ensemble choir with musicians from the cathedral, several parishes and Bishop Amat High School in La Puente provided music for many still in shock about O'Connell's death at his home in Hacienda Heights on Feb. 18 at age 69.

One of the songs sung before the Mass was the traditional Irish ballad, "Danny Boy."

After Communion, the choir sang the Irish hymn "Lady of Knock," to whom O'Connell had a lifelong devotion. Among the lyrics: "Golden Rose, Queen of Ireland, all my cares and troubles cease. As we kneel with love before you, Lady of Knock, my Queen of Peace."

Various religious leaders also were present – from the Armenian Apostolic Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church, Episcopal Church, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Baptist Church and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints as well as from the American Jewish Committee, the Hindu Vedanta Society, the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation, the California Sikh Council and the Baha'i faith.

David O'Connell, a nephew from Ireland who shared a name with his uncle, said in a reflection at the end of Mass that "for me and my family and everyone listening here, we all have an opportunity to pick up where he left off and carry on the example that he set. Help those that you can help. Lend an ear and listen to people. Respect each other. Be considerate and give others the benefit of the doubt. Have patience and give everyone a chance."

He added that his uncle "liked being a comedian, but he had a day job that seemed to be going better for him. … Uncle Dave was an inspiration for our whole lives. He taught us if we have the capacity to help someone, you should do it. All he wanted to do was make things easier for everyone else, and never asked for a single thing in return.

"He never ended a phone call without telling me how proud he was of me. And I hope he knows how proud we are of him. Let those close to you know that you love them and that you are proud of them."

O'Connell was interred in the cathedral's mausoleum following his funeral Mass.

A version of this story appeared in the **March 17-30, 2023** print issue under the headline: Thousands gather at funeral Mass for LA's O'Connell, recalled as 'soul friend' to all.