

A photograph of a sunset over a forest. The sky is a mix of purple, blue, and orange. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright glow. Silhouetted trees are in the foreground, and a mountain range is visible in the background.

*Celebration of Life*

JACK NILAND, O.F.M. CAP. 1949-2009





# *Celebration of Life*

## Fr. Jack Niland: Faithful friar, best friend to many

MR. TONY C. DIAZ  
—*The Pacific Voice*—23 August 2009



[Above-below] Our Lady of Good Counsel—Pearl City, Hawaii—08 May 2001



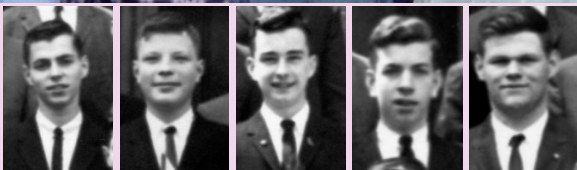
Silver Priesthood Jubilee—08 May 2001



Paulo Kosaka and Jack Niland



2009—1966  
Thomas Gavin  
Joseph Becker  
Frank Walsh  
Bernard Kinlan  
Jack Niland



To the very end, he was a dear friend and a joyful human being who always made time to bring cheer, help and the love of God to other people. Scores of Catholics gathered in separate memorial Masses in Guam, Hawaii and New York this month to remember the late Fr. John “Jack” Niland, a beloved Capuchin friar whose kindness touched the heart of thousands.

The devoted servant of God died 05 August of cancer. He was 59. Though he spent his last days in the friars’ home in Yonkers, New York, Fr. Jack remained in constant contact with many of his friends, former students and parishioners in Guam. The island was a big part of him, and he was a tremendous part of so many people’s lives. “He was very inspirational. He had a lot of influence in my life,” said Roland Sondia, a 47-year-old Agat parishioner. “Whenever myself or any other parishioner for that matter ... would need somebody to talk to, he’s always there,” said Sondia. “His door is always open no matter what time of day it is.” He was that way no matter what village you were from” said Sondia.

Fr. Jack served on Guam for 23 years, from 1976 to 1999. He was primarily at the parishes of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Agat, and Our Lady of Guadalupe in Santa Rita but also served two terms as the Vice Provincial of the Capuchins [1985-1991].

Fr. Jack became a Capuchin in 1967 and was ordained a priest May 8, 1976. Just a few months later he arrived on Guam where his first assignment was as an associate pastor at Mt. Carmel under then Fr. Anthony Apuron, pastor. Sondia was just a boy when he first met Fr. Jack. He and his family would develop lifelong friendships.

“I started as an altar boy that year when Fr. Jack came,” said Sondia. “I’ve known him ever since.” “Fr. Jack was more -- he was like a mentor to most of us,” he said. “He was like a father to a lot of us that were down there, just like the bishop was. He really took care of us, he took us in and he guided us and he actually nurtured a lot of us.” “In talking with a bunch of my friends who had grown up with Fr. Jack, [he pretty much raised us], we all shared the same sentiments,” said Sondia. “If it hadn’t been for his influence both spiritually and mentally I guess we probably would not be as well off as we are today.”



Many people describe that type of relationship with Fr. Jack. For instance, father became deeply endeared to Mt. Carmel School's Class of 1977 from the day he first entered their classroom 33 years ago. "He walked in August of 1976, two months after he came out of the seminary," said Attorney Mike Phillips.

"We could tell right away that he was very, very different and that he already considered Guam home and considered us part of his family."

"Everybody fell in love with him instantaneously and we could tell from that point on that he was somebody special," said Phillips. "I don't think my classmates would ever have dreamed that he would have carried on this lifelong relationship with us."

That Mt. Carmel Class of '77 was and still is a very close-knit group. They've maintained ties throughout the years and regularly communicate through email with one another. Fr. Jack was part of that regular communication, which included special long distance phone conversations in which he would cheer and console us more than they did him!

Described by many as a happy, kind-hearted person who had a great sense of humor, Fr. Jack made an impact on youth like Phillips and his classmates, like few others ever did. This young, tall, big-bellied, bald Capuchin had a way of relating and talking to them that was captivating and endearing.

"He did so much by always saying so very little. He just had a way of doing that," said Phillips, who today heads Mt. Carmel's dynamic alumni and endowment foundation. "His homilies, everybody generally who attended his Masses know that they were very short," said Phillips. "But so were his lectures, he kept his instruction very exciting and he was always able to relate religion to our everyday lives. I'm not talking about just the people but as the ninth graders from the south he was very successful and just had a knack and a gift that allowed him to do that."

**Counselor and friend**-Fr. Jack made special time to sit down with, listen to and console youth and adults alike who were experiencing difficulties. That is a truth his Capuchin brothers and people from Agat and Santa Rita and others on Guam describe universally.

"He could never say 'no' to anyone," recalled Fr. George Maddock, a longtime Capuchin on Guam. "He always said, 'there's always hope, there's always hope. You *gotta* reach out; you can't just turn them away.' He was very kind in that direction." Fr. George said some people took advantage of Fr. Jack's big heart. But such was the nature of the gentle giant of a friar. "Fr. Jack was a pleasant fellow," said Father George. "He never got upset."

"He was very calm and mild type of person," agreed Fr. Felixberto Leon-Guerrero, First Councilor of the Guam and Hawaii Capuchins. He was not an excitable person yet he was a person that could always get things done. Fr. Felix also remembers Fr. Jack for his great sense of humor and for being a very prayerful person.

The Capuchins and many faithful from Guam gathered at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Church in Agaña Heights Thursday, August 13 to honor Fr. Jack. Many attended that Mass and multitudes also showed up during services in New York and Hawaii.

Fr. Jack was also much loved in Hawaii where he served as Pastor of Our Lady of Good Counsel in Pearl City 1999-2008. "The parish and church was jam-packed," said Fr. George. "There was no room left. You would think it was the pope who was getting the memorial Mass. Everybody was there." "He touched the lives of so many people," said Fr. George. "They were talking about it on the other side of the island."

Fr. Jack served at Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in Santa Rita from 1991 to 1999. Mrs. Regina Mendiola was very close to Fr. Jack during his time at Our Lady of Guadalupe. At the time she faithfully *manned* the parish office, took care of the altar, cleaned the church, and cooked – all as a volunteer. "I miss him very much," said Tan Regina. "Oh he was so friendly to people. When someone was in trouble, Fr. Jack was really there to help," said Tan Regina. "And he's so nice. He was such a nice person." "That's why the people are so close, even Agat people and Santa Rita, they're so close to him because he's so nice a person." Fr. Jack came to see Tan Regina when he was here earlier this year in January to attend the jubilee of Fr. Eric Forbes and the Capuchins' latest meeting and election. Her feelings of missing Fr. Jack and appreciation for the care that he extended to her can be multiplied many times over here and in other places like Hawaii.

Phillips came to learn through the years that the loving attention and genuine care Fr. Jack would give to the students of Mt. Carmel extended to many grade levels, multiple ages and different people throughout Guam and elsewhere. "My surprise is learning that he was like that to every class, he was like that to every village, he was like that to Guam and Hawaii," said Phillips. "Although I always felt that way, I really didn't know that everyone else also felt the same way. I think that's my greatest surprise is learning that what he did with us, which most of us believe is quite an accomplishment, is really the same way he carried out his relationships with -- I would say, everybody -- every parish."

"He truly was everybody's best friend," said Phillips.

[Reprinted with the permission of Mr. Tony C. Diaz, Co-Editor of the *Pacific Voice*]

## Celebration of Life

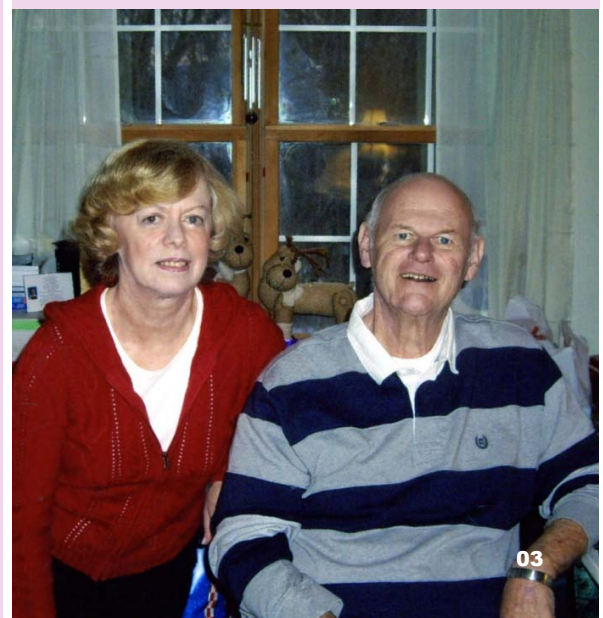
JACK NILAND, O. F. M. CAP.



[Above] Michel Dalton and Jack-2001  
[Below] Thomas March, John Tokaz and Jack-circa 1996



[Below] Carole Niland-Gerondel with Jack—December 2008





# *Celebration of Life*

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

The Capuchin Franciscan Friars of the Province of St. Mary mourned the death of their brother John Niland, who after his long battle with cancer, died on Wednesday, 05 August in Yonkers, New York at the age of 59.

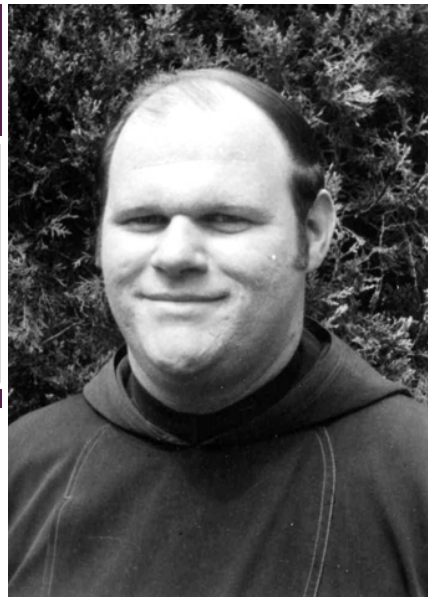
Jack was born on 25 October 1949 to John and Catherine Flynn-Niland in the Bronx, New York. He was baptized on 17 November 1949 at the Church of St. Helena, also in the Bronx.

He attended St. Raymond Elementary School from 1955-1963 and Saint Mary Seminary High School in Garrison, New York from 1963- 1967. The following September he entered the Capuchin novitiate of St. Lawrence in Milton, MA and was simply professed on 01 September 1968.

In 1968, Jack began his undergraduate studies at Saint Anselms College, Manchester, NH, while residing with the friar community of St. Anthony in Hudson, NH. He graduated in 1972 receiving his BA in philosophy. He pronounced solemn vows on 07 September 1974 at Mary Immaculate Friary, Garrison, NY. Following graduation, he continued his studies at the Maryknoll School of Theology in Ossining, NY and was awarded both his Masters of Divinity and Theology in 1976.

During his theological studies he ministered at Harlem Valley Hospital in Wingdale, New York; Children's Village [Dobbs Ferry]; and as a deacon at Holy Spirit Church in Peekskill, New York.

Fr. Jack Niland was ordained to the priesthood by Terence Cardinal Cooke, Archbishop of New York on 08 May 1976 at the Monastery Church of the Sacred Heart, Yonkers, New York.

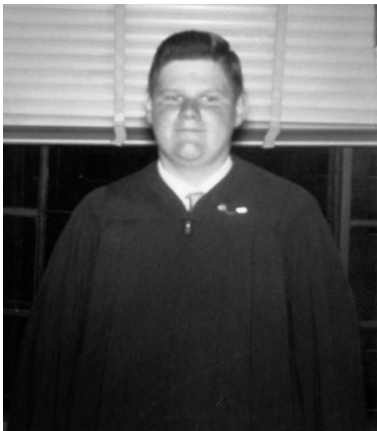


## Jack Niland, O.F.M. Cap. 1949-2009



[Row 1-seated]: Denis Kosar, John Fortunato, [Fr.] Ronan O'Brien, Anthony Speranza, Robert Philp; [row 2-standing]: Robert Reinckens, Stephen DeMaio, Aleck Grishkevich, Vincent Senatore, Francis Walsh; [row 3]: Patrick Quinlan, John Niland, Thomas Gavin, Francis Bellafiore; [row 4]: William Kenny, Joseph Becker, Patrick Mulvey, Bernard Kinlan, Robert Reddy; [row 5-top]: Charles Lewis, John Maher, William Kelly, Joseph Segreto. [Above] Photo taken at Garrison, New York-spring 1966.

Saint Raymond School 8<sup>th</sup> grade graduate: June-1963; Investiture Day at Saint Lawrence novitiate in Milton, Massachusetts: 31 August 1967; Mrs. Catherine Niland with her son, Jack: May, 1976.







[Continued from previous page]

Following his ordination, our brother Jack ministered in the Marianas Islands and Hawaii for the next 32 years. He ministered as teacher and counselor until 1978, and then appointed pastor of Mt. Carmel in Agat, serving until 1985. He was elected Vice Provincial of the Vice Province of Our Lady Star of the Sea from 1985-1991. He also served on the vice provincial council for three terms [1982-85; 1993-96; and 1997-2000]. During his terms as vice provincial he ministered as pastor of San Juan Bautista in Ordot. From 1991-99 he continued his parochial ministry as pastor of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Santa Rita.

In 1999, Fr. Jack was appointed pastor of Our Lady of Good Counsel in Pearl City, HI and served until 2008 when his poor health forced him to return to the States for medical attention. He resided with the friars of St. Clare in Yonkers, NY until the time of his death.

Jack was survived by his mother Catherine Niland of Sparkill, NY and one sister, Carole Gerondel and her husband Tom of Pearl River New York and their son Bill and his wife Alison.

A Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated at Sacred Heart Church Yonkers, New York on Saturday, 08 August 2009 at 11:00 a.m. Provincial Minister John Gallagher was the liturgy presider and our brother Eric Forbes offered the homily.

[Homily text on next page]

## *Celebration of Life*

JACK NILAND, O. F. M. CAP.



[Top left]: Departure Celebration in the Bronx, NY-1976; [bottom row] Edward Allen, Vincent Senatore, Michel Dalton, [middle row] Jack Niland, Catherine Niland, John McHugh, [top row] Capistran Ferrito and vicar provincial minister Don Bosco Duquette; [Center-churches left to right]: Our Lady of Mt. Carmel in Agat; San Juan Bautista in Ordot; Our Lady of Guadalupe in Santa Rita; [Above] Sentiments on the occasion of Jack's 25<sup>th</sup> Priesthood Jubilee at Our Lady of Good Counsel-Pearl City, Hawaii on Saturday, 05 May 2001; [Right] Jack with his altar servers: Shayne Schermerhorn, Jasmine Maganis-Kaoihana, Chase Higashi, Matthew Spencer, Mikah Anguay and Dayne Saito at Our Lady of Good Counsel, published in the *Hawaii Catholic Herald* 22 February 2008.



As many of you know, Jack was not really a movie person. Only very rarely did Jack go to the movies. One of the funniest Jack stories involves a movie. It was when *Dances with Wolves* was a big hit. If you remember, Kevin Costner becomes a member of a Native American tribe. It was a kind of 'feel good' movie and Jack really wanted to see it but for some reason or another could never remember its name.

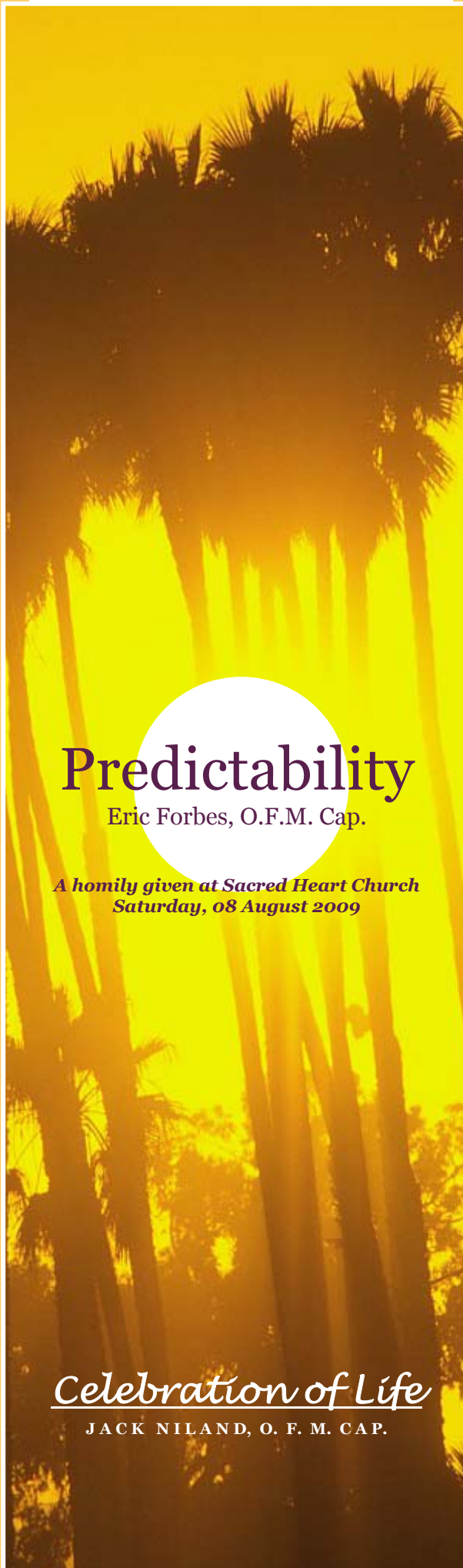
Speaking with Donan Hickey to clarify the name of the movie; all he could remember was that there was an animal in the title of the movie. Donan said, 'Sure, of course. I know what you're talking about,' and directed Jack to the movie. So, Jack went – sat down – expecting to see this wonderful hit that made everybody feel so warm and fuzzy. Boy was he in for a surprise! Donan did send him to a movie with an animal's name in the title--not *Dances with Wolves*-- but *Silence of the Lambs*.

Another favorite of the few movies Jack saw was *The Sixth Sense*. That's the movie where Bruce Willis plays a psychologist to a young boy who claims to see dead people. The most amazing part of the movie was the very end, with no prior warning we all found out that Bruce Willis was one of the dead people that the young boy sees. I remember Jack sharing how much he enjoyed being surprised by such an unpredictable ending.

It's human nature to enjoy the unpredictable. After all, who wants to keep reading a book or keep listening to a joke or a preacher when you know exactly what follows at every turn?

There were many unpredictable things in Jack's life. Who knew that this young man from a diocesan parish in the Bronx would join the Capuchins? He didn't grow up knowing the friars but a friar came to his parish to invite young men to attend our high school in Garrison. Jack didn't think about going but one of his friends did and his friend didn't want to go alone. He asked Jack to go. 'Go with your brother', Jack said. In the end, Jack went. His friend never joined the Order, but Jack did. Who knew?

And who knew that this most New Yorker of a priest would be assigned very quickly to a far-away, tiny island? Some friars knew the day they entered the Order that they wanted to be missionaries far from home. Not Jack. He told the story about how he and his five ordination classmates were all on retreat. The provincial went up to talk to them and said: 'Listen, talk amongst yourselves and decide which one of you five is going to Guam, because one of you is certainly going.'



# Predictability

Eric Forbes, O.F.M. Cap.

*A homily given at Sacred Heart Church  
Saturday, 08 August 2009*

## Celebration of Life

JACK NILAND, O. F. M. CAP.

Jack himself continued the story: I looked at the other four: one of them speaks beautiful Spanish, so he'll probably go to Central America. Another is a straight 'A' student so he'll probably stay here. Another is already set to start work on a doctorate. And then there's me.

So Jack met with the provincial and agreed to go to Guam. Who knew?

Apparently the provincial knew. Years later, the provincial told Jack: '...we always knew you would be the one; we just wanted you guys to figure it out.' And apparently, Peter Damian knew.

On another occasion, when Jack was Vice Provincial and visiting the Province, a friar asked Jack: how long had he been on Guam? Jack told him. And how many years ago were you elected Vice Provincial? And Jack answered him. And the friar said: Ah, so Peter Damian was right. A surprised Jack asked, 'Right about what?' The friar replied, 'Peter Damian told us: send Jack to Guam and within 10 years he'll be superior.'

Who knew? God knew. God had a reason for sending Jack to a new home and a new people, because of the great impact Jack would have on the friars and on the people of the Vice Province.

If this funeral were held on Guam or Hawaii, there would not be enough room in this beautiful church to seat the thousands of people who would like to be here. It is no mere exaggeration for me to say: that if this were taking place in Guam or Hawaii, we would need several days to accommodate the number of people wanting to pay their last respects.

No matter where Jack went, he was immensely loved. But more than his capacity to win over the crowds was his talent for making long and lasting friendships. Beginning with his family, to his childhood friends (some of whom are here today), to those on Guam and Hawaii (some of whom have come today as well) to the many friars, to the people of all ages and colors in the photos that always lined his bookshelves and desk – Jack was rich in friendships. In a tribute to Jack in the Guam newspaper today, the headline did not read – Our Pastor is Gone. It read – 'Our Friend is Gone'. Jack excelled in many things; but none as important as being our friend.

*And what made Jack such a terrific friend? He was so predictable.*

You knew—that on Monday morning—you would find Jack at his desk studying the readings for that Sunday's Mass. You knew—that on Sunday—Jack would start off his homily with a joke or a story. You knew—that on Tuesdays—Jack went to the Guam hospital to visit his sick parishioners. And you knew—that every weekday—between 2:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.—Jack would be in front of the Tabernacle making his holy hour.

On and on we can describe how predictable Jack was but the best thing of all was that you knew that when you needed a friend; when the world closed its doors on you; when you yourself were your own worst critic; without the slightest doubt our brother Jack would be there making you feel that you were the most important person in the world to him at that very moment. He made you believe that it was OK if your life wasn't perfect.

**“Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest.”**

We will never lack for people who will tell us how we are to shape up or to get us to move, to make changes, to keep working at it. What we do lack at times are people who know that we are doing our best and to tell us *you're doing fine – come and rest.*

We see our Lord doing exactly that in the Gospel. When we were with Jack we rested in his safe, non-judgmental presence, in his cheerfulness and sense of humor that magically saw the bright spots where you and I only saw darkness.

‘Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest.’ For hundreds of people, those words of Jesus came alive when they went to Jack Niland.

Who knew? Who knew that Jack would leave us so soon? But even there – God knew – and God had a purpose.

‘None of us lives for himself,’ says Paul, ‘and no one dies for oneself. For if we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord.’

God is unpredictable in the instruments He chooses to show us His predictable love and mercy. One day God uses someone's words and the next day God uses somebody's silence. God worked through the strong, healthy Jack for 32 years of active priesthood but God also worked just as well through the weak and struggling Jack this past year and a half.

Jack felt awful about leaving active ministry. He felt badly that his absence would affect his parish, the Hawaii friars and the whole Vice Province; not to mention the effect on his family and his friends.

We did see the sad Jack, where the laughter was silenced, as he pondered the mystery of these unpredictable turn of events. Like Jeremiah, he could say ‘All is wormwood and gall.’

I happened to be in Yonkers the day he received the clear news from the doctor that the best they could do was make him as comfortable as possible in the little time he had left. I kept wondering how this news would affect Jack.

Earlier that morning Jack was a bit somber. When I saw him later that afternoon, it was a brand new Jack—not in body but in spirit.

He clearly told me that I wasn't to mention this outcome to anyone. He stated that he would be the one to let people know, each at the right time.

We spent the next ten or twelve days together and all I saw was the same old cheerful Jack. He was weaker to be sure but joking, even about his death. We spoke about good times, how blessed he was and what a good life God had given him. He was grateful to God for giving him this time to prepare. He began making the phone calls, receiving visitors and making decisions about his funeral.

Most of all he began telling people what he felt they needed to know and hearing from people what he needed to hear even though it was all so predictable. Jack simply told everyone in his own way that he loved them and each told Jack in their own way that he or she loved him. No surprise endings there.

How good God was in the way Jack faced death, teaching us how to die just as he taught us how to live. ‘The favors of the Lord are not exhausted...they are renewed each morning. It is good to hope in silence, for the saving help of God.’

To Mrs. Niland, Carole and Tommy, Billy and Alison: a few people from Guam who I have spoken, who, I am sure, speak for so many hundreds on Guam and Hawaii, made me promise that I would tell you how thankful they are that you shared your son and your brother with them all those years, far away from you.

It may have been a sacrifice on your part to have your only son and only brother so far from home, but be comforted by the fact that hundreds of people bear the name and remembrance of your son deeply in their hearts. The name of Father Jack Niland will be repeated a long, long time for years to come in our islands.

And so, as the world carries on ever-bored with the predictable and the usual; always itching for the new and the different; we say farewell to Jack. We call to mind the lessons God taught us through Jack and we see that when it comes to love—predictability is not such a bad thing.

**“For if we live, we live for the Lord;  
and if we die, we die for the Lord.”**

**ROMANS 14:8**