

# Latin, a deceased priest and Shakespeare are gone but not forgotten

Today a visit to a dead language and a man who breathed life into it. And then we shall revisit a dead man who, for 400 years, has been meddling in the affairs of the living.

We begin this little journey up in Milwaukee last week at the funeral for Reginald Foster, who, at age 81, died of, yes, Covid.

We shall start with the first paragraph of his obituary from

the News York Times. It reads thus:

“Reginald Foster, a former plumber’s apprentice from Wisconsin who, in four decades as an official Latinist of the Vatican, dreamed in Latin, cursed in Latin, banked in Latin and ultimately tweeted in Latin, died on Christmas Day at a nursing home in Milwaukee. He was LXXXI.”

That last sentence, a bit of subtle Latin humor. Ever try to

figure out when a movie was made by watching the credits at the end? Tough to do. They always put it in Roman numerals — a string of Xs and Ms and an occasional V — which is Latin. For instance, the new year of 2021 is, in Roman numerals, MMXXI.

Reginald Foster, one of the world’s few authorities on the Latin language, would have enjoyed the humor of the obituary. He was a Catholic priest, who, because of his natural interest and the ability he developed, went to Rome as a young man and settled into a lifetime job at the only place on the planet where the Latin language is valued — and I say “valued,” not “spoken” — because, you see, the 2,000-year-old language is still the language of the 2,000-year-old church.

But nobody, not even the Pope, can speak much Latin today. But it is still used in official documents: Letters of promotion, diplomatic documents, messages from the Pope to the faithful, official records of all sorts. Thus did the plumber from Milwaukee become the final authority on the Latin writing of

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## A MOMENT Ed Breen



four popes: Paul VI, John Paul I and II, and Benedict XVI, composing original documents in Latin, and translating their speeches and other writings into Latin from a series of papal languages. John Paul II was Polish, Benedict XVI was German, and Francis is Argentinian, although

Father Foster retired in 2009 and returned to Milwaukee before Francis was elevated to the job.

He was by all accounts, one of those delightful people beloved by all. His proper title was Father Reginald, but was universally known by his students — even in his presence — simply as Reggie.

“You cannot understand St. Augustine in English,” he said in an interview. “Augustine thought in Latin. It is like listening to Mozart played through a juke-box.”

The Vatican, at any rate, found it could not do without him. When there was an encyclical to be translated; a congratulatory letter to a cardinal or bishop to be written; a contemporary term, like “microchip,” that required a Latin equivalent, it turned to the man in the blue work clothes who seldom wore a Roman collar. Incidentally, “microchip” became “assula minutula electrica” or “tiny amber wood chip.”

And that recalls a Marion school board meeting back about 1970, when the school board was being asked by the administration to drop the teaching of Latin at Marion High School.

Ruth Cartwright, then the owner and editor of the News Herald, made an impassioned appeal to the board to keep the

classic language, but to no avail.

Fred Bechtold, then assistant superintendent who went on to a long career at the Elkhart school system, fancied himself as a bit of a classicist. He rose, gently inserted his thumbs into his vest pockets and addressed the complaint:

“Mrs. Cartwright,” he said, “never again will Caesar cross the Rubicon and I, too, lament the passing of Latin.”

End of discussion.

But to move along and revisit William Shakespeare. Seems he will never go away and for that we are thankful.

Someone compiled his observations on some of the issues of the year just past. For example, when countries began lockdowns to flatten the Covid curve, this from Hamlet, act 3, scene 2, seems right:

“Hell itself breathes out contagion to this world.”

Or when President Trump refused to condemn white supremacists in Charlottesville, this from Coriolanus strikes the right tone:

“‘Twas you incensed the rabble.”

Or, finally, from Macbeth, act 3, scene 2, when you are asked “how are you?” simply respond:

“So weary with disasters.”

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## Argylls

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seamless transition.

“It was something that we knew was coming,” Oak Hill Head Coach Kevin Renbarger said. “He [defends] with a lot of confidence, and he is able to do it without fouling. He’s got tremendous length, so he is able to defend in the post, and has the quickness of a point guard to defend on the perimeter.”

While Brown did his work on the defensive end, it was Howell who helped to jump-start the Argylls’ offense.

After a scoreless two-and-a-half minutes to begin the first quarter, and after Biegel opened the scoring for Oak Hill, the Argylls responded with 11 straight points, eight of which came from Howell. His back-to-back triples put Madison-Grant up 9-2 with 3:32 remaining in the first quarter, and his third basket of the

frame a short time later put the Argylls firmly in control.

“They are playing with a ton of confidence,” Renbarger said. “They’ve always been able to score on the offensive end, but the difference is confidence. We were never, ever in a position to challenge that comfort level.”

The Argylls opened the second quarter with seven straight points, including back-to-back triples from Brown and Jackson Manwell, to go up by 14, holding the Golden Eagles scoreless for over two minutes in the process. Madison-Grant held that double-digit advantage the rest of the first half, leading 28-16 at the halftime break.

Oak Hill made their push in the third quarter, twice cutting the Argylls’ lead to 10 points, but each time, Madison-Grant had an answer.

After the Golden Eagles trimmed the lead to 30-20 in the first two minutes of the second half, Justin Moore and Howell responded with a basket in the paint and a three-pointer, respectively, to increase the Argylls’ advantage back to 15. At the 1:16 mark, Oak Hill’s Kian Hite again cut the deficit to 10 points, but Moore responded with a crucial three-point play in the final 10 seconds of the period to prevent momentum from swinging in the Golden Eagles’ favor.

“Every time they made a little bit of a run at us, we were able to counter,” Cherry said. “We made big [shots] at [opportunity times,] and that kept them at bay. We knew the run was coming. I was happy we were able to withstand that.”

Moore carried the load in the third quarter, scoring seven points and using his size to his advantage in the post, while Howell helped to close the game out for the Argylls, scoring five points in the final eight minutes, including a pair of free throws.

Howell led Madison-Grant with 21 points to go along with four rebounds, while Moore finished with 14 points. Manwell collected eight points, while Brown added six along with five boards.

For Oak Hill, Hite finished with 12 points and four rebounds, while Biegel and McKinney each finished with 11.

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