COMMEMORATIVE REMARKS:

ANTHONY ABRAHAM

SPEECH FOR

RAYMOND KAYAL

There is an anonymous legend that teaches us, “Past the seeker as he prayed came the crippled and the beggar and the beaten, and seeing them… he cried, “Great God, how is it that a loving creator can see such things and yet do nothing about them? And God replied, I did do something. I made **YOU**.” To all that knew him, Anthony Abraham was truly a gift from God. He lived his life in the service of others, he appreciated all that this world had to offer, he made his time on earth **really** matter- and fortunately for all of us, he lived a long and active life, and that is why, today, we honor this wonderful human being. Although he passed on to his great reward at the ripe old age of 100, the impact of his time here on earth will never be forgotten.

The Scottish poet, Thomas Campbell said, “To live in hearts we leave behind is not to die,” and to that end, Anthony Abraham is very much alive in each one of us. I remember the first time I met him. It was back in 1959 and I was working on a project for my marketing class-I was in my senior year at the University of Miami, and I had to interview a local businessman for some much coveted “behind the scenes insight”-my future father-in-law and he were close friends and I just knew that to be allowed such privileged and personal access to one of Miami’s most respected entrepreneurs would definitely serve the purpose of the assignment. The appointment was set. I arrived at Anthony Abraham Chevrolet and was ushered into the “inner sanctum” by his assistant. It was all very impressive and I was **very** impressionable at the time. The office was actually quite grand-from the monument of a desk to the extra fine roll of probably the largest and most exquisite cigar in all of southern Florida, the suave and dapper Mr. Abraham completed the picture of success and achievement as he warmly greeted me and we began our preliminary repartee. I chose the best moment I could and went for the essence of the interview. I politely asked my first question, after all, here I am a college senior, sitting face to face with one of the leaders of the Miami business scene-what could **POSSIBLY** happen? That first question was simple, “Can you tell me for how much this business is capitalized?” …To which returned the loudest and most imposing and thundering boom of a response that filled to overflowing, that expansive office, “**THAT’S NONE OF YOUR DAMNED BUSINESS!!**!” After I recovered some semblance of composure-fortunately no paramedics were needed (**Wait for the laugh**), I realized that I had been initiated into the “Anthony Abraham School of Humor.” It was one of the hallmark moments of my life and I instantly realized that I was in the company of someone very special. I was blessed to know the man, the myth, loving husband, philanthropist, father, and most of all, friend, for over half a century.

Anthony Abraham was born in 1911 in Youngstown, Ohio. He was the fourth of seven siblings and was the only one of the family to attend college. Although he graduated from the University of Detroit, his postgraduate studies at law school had to be curtailed during the Great Depression and he headed for the professional world at the Chicago Evening American. Although still quite young by standards of maturity and insight, there are 2 morsels of information we have about the early years of this great man that speak volumes to his creativity, compassion, conscience, and resilience. We know that as a child, he vowed, “If, by the grace of God, I ever could, I would feed the poor and help the sick.” We also know that he had the vision to take what he learned from his time spent at the newspaper and parlay that experience into a successful spin-off known as the “Help Wanted News.” He built that project, sold it off quite successfully, and finally had the financial wherewithal to fulfill his childhood promise to himself. From that point, it was onward and upward to create the adventures and achievements of a lifetime. It was time to give back to humanity.

It is said that people come into our lives for “a season, a reason, or a lifetime.” If we keep our hearts and minds open, and we are willing to accept and respond to God’s master plan, miracles DO happen. “All of us are born for a reason, but all of us don’t discover why. Success in life has nothing to do with what you gain in life or accomplish for yourself. It’s what you do for others.” Danny Thomas said those words, and it’s easy to see why these two gentlemen were such good friends. Anthony Abraham had his boyhood vision and Danny Thomas vowed to give back to humanity in the name of St Jude Thaddeus. At the time they planned for the creation of St Jude’s Children’s Hospital, could either of them have even fathomed the impact their dedication to this cause could have had on generations of families? Their mutual mission, along with Dr. Lemuel Diggs, was that “no child should die in the dawn of life.” It is staggering to think of the power of the vision these men had, and the impact on our future-the children of this country. St Jude’s has become an eminent and globally respected hospital where the greatest minds of contemporary generations work tirelessly to conquer the demons of children’s cancers and other life threatening and catastrophic conditions. Cancer survival rates in children have improved quantumly over the past fifty years thanks to the tireless dedication of the St. Jude’s medical and research staff, and no child is denied treatment no matter the financial condition of the family. Anthony Abraham had a simple mission and that was to make a difference to others, and he consistently kept his word.

His devotion to his family is legendary as well. He and his beloved late wife, Genevieve, gave with their hearts and souls, and their beautiful legacy is with us today. The Abraham vision and life purpose lives on in their children. George, Thomas, Norma Jean, Judith and Marion, and all have received the supreme gift to call these exceptional people, “Mother” and “Father.” To the Abraham children and grandchildren here with us today, all I can say is, “Wow!!” Words cannot express the appreciation I had for your parents. All I can say, on behalf of all of us here today who knew Anthony Abraham and his beautiful wife Genevieve, is, “Thank you.” Thank you for sharing the heart and soul of your family with us. Thank you for carrying on and sustaining their vision of selfless service and healing to those who really need a helping and guiding hand. Thank you for sharing the joy and wisdom and humor that exemplified your parents. Mother Teresa has taught us that, “Love begins at home, and it is not how much we do…but how much love we put in that action.” The Abraham home was clearly one that abounded in love for each other and all with whom they come into contact.

Saint Augustine said, “What does love look like? It has the hands to help others. It has the feet to hasten to the poor and needy. It has the eyes to see misery and want. It has the ears to hear the sorrows of men. That is what love looks like.” Of course, when he said that, Saint Augustine hadn’t met Anthony Abraham yet! (**Wait for the laugh**). Now Saint Augustine can add some more descriptive phrases to further define what love looks like, and as he adds to his earlier observations, he might say, “Love also looks like a powerful and dignified man, one who is always impeccably turned out, with dashing grey hair and a perpetual glint in his eye, always ready to take a good honest look at his surroundings and see what is urgently required by the most needy. And as he observes, he then gives and gives and gives.

The generosity, benevolence, and faith that exuded from Anthony Abraham are truly legendary. His honors and distinctions are more than we can even begin to list. The most precious lesson we can keep with us about this special person is to remember what his vow to himself was. As a youth, he didn’t think about material possessions or typical boyhood dreams. His goal in life was to help those in need and he spent a long, rich, and colorful life giving back over and over and over again. Through tragedy and triumph, he kept his focus on giving to those who needed something more than he did. Life and faith and God provided the means to fulfill his life’s mission and this world is a much richer place for having Mr. Abraham grace its paths.

And here we are today, in this very hallowed hall, bearing witness to the bestowal of the truly extraordinary high honor of the Order of Malta Cross of pro Merito Melitensi, one of the most exemplary acknowledgements of a life devoted to the service of others. It is one of the highlights of my own life to be able to not only be here in the presence of such an honor, but to have a mentor like Anthony Abraham in my life to guide me to do good in this world is truly an inestimable blessing. I am proud, humbled and honored to have had the privilege to say a few words about the man who has meant to so much to all of us.

In conclusion, let us remember that Anthony Abraham was kind of a paradox. While he was a giant in the business world, he was simultaneously a humble servant to the needy. Through his enormous generosity of heart and resources, he shared his riches of personality and finances with all of the charities and causes he supported. He was a man who was passionate about his faith, the Maronite Catholic Church, his love of his family and his patriotic devotion to his country, as well as his profound pride in his Lebanese heritage. Sir Anthony Abraham, KM was an exemplary human being and a paragon of the best of human virtues. He was an outstanding citizen, a tireless philanthropist, and a truly dedicated servant of God.

Thank you all, (**If you think it’s appropriate, you can say**) and to Anthony, who I know is watching from a very large desk in Heaven with an even larger cigar poised and ready to be savored, may I offer a heartfelt and respectful, Congratulations!