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Shipps' inspiration came from faith

Don Shipps was a dear friend. In reading and viewing the media coverage following his tragic death last Friday morning, my heart was warmed by the tender comments made by fellow musicians and fans regarding his kindness, his gentleness, his generosity.



Joann Heath

Yes, Don was all of that and more. I would like to share a side of Don that the music community may not know about him, the reason for his kindness, gentleness and generosity — his deep Christian faith.

The last time I saw Don was in St. Joseph Church's adoration chapel a couple of weeks ago (the chapel that Don and I served as coordinators together for two years). My daughter and I were in prayer when Don entered and he told us a beautiful, typically "Don," story.

A dear teacher friend of his was dying in a local nursing home. She had been his music teacher at St. Joseph Elementary School and Don commented that she was the one who had inspired his passion for music. Now, lying unresponsive in her bed, Don softly played Gregorian chant music in the background as he knelt beside his friend. He took her hand in his, and prayed his favorite prayer, the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, calling on his Savior to shower her with love and mercy, preparing her for eternity. Her lips began to move silently in prayer and Don was moved to tears, humbled at the privilege of being Our Lord's instrument of grace at such an eternal moment.

The following morning Don received word that his beloved teacher had died peacefully in the night. That afternoon, as we knelt in the chapel, Don asked my daughter if we could all pray a rosary together in her memory and for her family. As we prayed, taking turns leading the decades of the rosary and meditating on the life of Our Lord, little did any of us know that Don's life would be short in this world, and that soon he would join his dear teacher into eternity.

At Don's funeral Mass on Wednesday at St. Joseph Church, admirers and loved ones will experience firsthand what made Don Shipps a "titan" in his music, in his relationships and in his faith. May Our Lord grant eternal rest to Don, and may His perpetual light shine upon my dear friend.

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