

Thousands Gather to Remember Oral Roberts

✖ Healing evangelist Oral Roberts was remembered Monday as an extraordinary but imperfect minister who was driven by a passion to obey God.

Thousands of mourners filled the Mabee Center at Oral Roberts University (ORU) in Tulsa, Okla., to honor the legacy of a man Crystal Cathedral pastor Robert H. Schuller called one of the most inspiring voices of Christ of the last century. Roberts died Dec. 15 of complications from pneumonia. He was 91.

(Photo: Roberta Potts and Richard Roberts eulogized their father during Monday's memorial service.)

Among the attendees at Monday's memorial service were Bible teacher Marilyn Hickey, Atlanta pastor Creflo Dollar, Christian Broadcasting Network founder Pat Robertson and Fox News anchor Kelly Wright, an ORU alumnus who sang during the service.

ORU President Mark Rutland said what made Roberts an "extraordinary" man was that "he experienced a gracious and powerful God."

"There was something when Oral leaned into that television and said, 'Something good is going to happen to you today.' There was something that leaped inside of us and said, 'It's true.'" Rutland said.

Roberts rose from humble beginnings to become one of the most influential Christian leaders of the 20th century. His message of seed faith and divine healing spread around the world through his books and television broadcasts. In 1963, he founded ORU, which is now one of the nation's leading Pentecostal universities.

Roberts emerged at a time when the church was “weary and dreary,” Rutland said, and “made us believe in a God who enjoys blessing people.”

“He was not a perfect man; he was an extraordinary man—a giant who served a perfect God,” Rutland added. “What an interesting and historical irony that He took a young man with a speech impediment and caused him to be named Oral, healed him of tuberculosis and made him a world-changer, a healer of the sick and an inspirational leader. That is the God of Oral Roberts, and that is our God as well.”

He called Roberts controversial seed-faith message “entirely biblical” and not “some unusual or bizarre doctrine from the edge of Christianity.”

“Jesus himself said, ‘Give and it shall be given unto you,’” Rutland said. “Oral didn’t make up those words, but he made them manageable and bite-sized.”

Roberts’ surviving children, Richard Roberts and Roberta Potts, remembered their father as a man who was committed to obeying God despite the fact that it often meant he was absent from home.

“He left his family behind, knowing they would be hurt,” Potts said. “He chose to go where God’s light is dim, then he chose to build that university that God called him to build. ... There may be some of you whose fathers or grandfathers made a similar choice. It hurts. You have to make the decision as to whether you believe he made the right choice. I know my father made the right choice. And I’m so proud that he made that choice.”

Potts said her father always had a bad reaction to morphine, though she did not elaborate on whether that influenced his death. She said before her father died, he asked to see her and Richard. When they arrived at the hospital he was singing songs such as “Expect a Miracle” and “Something Good Is Going

to Happen to You,” though he could barely move.

“He was singing at the top of his lungs,” Potts said. “Then he would stop for a while and say: ‘I’m going home. I’m going home. Hallelujah.’”

Richard Roberts read statements from Christian leaders including Schuller, Korean megachurch founder David Yonggi Cho, Lakewood Church founder Joel Osteen, healing evangelist Benny Hinn, Trinity Broadcasting Network Paul Crouch and evangelist Billy Graham, who said he it was a privilege to count Roberts among his friends.

Richard Roberts recalled how his father was dedicated to God before he was born and was healed of tuberculosis at age 17 in 1935 during a tent revival. “Two months later he preached his first message, ‘Healed by the Power of God,’” Roberts said.

He said God healed his relationship with his father when he was 19 and had gone through a season of rebellion. From that time forward, Richard said he walked beside his father in ministry. “I have been with him every step of the way—until he drew his last breath on earth and his first breath in heaven,” Roberts said.

He said his father taught him “Jesus is a healing Jesus. He taught me how to walk in love. He taught me how to forgive.”

Marilyn Hickey, whose mother was healed while watching Oral Roberts on television, challenged the attendees to follow Oral Roberts’ lead in building altars and making sacrifices so God’s fire will fall.

She said Roberts sacrificed his finances and his reputation amid criticism of his message on seed faith and divine healing. She added that he could have given up faith when his daughter, Rebecca Nash, died in an airplane accident and his oldest son, Ronnie, committed suicide after a long battle with drug addiction.

“But he put his depression on the altar. He put his grief on the altar. And what happened? The fire fell,” Hickey said. “Because he sacrificed, he produced thousands and thousands of sons and daughters.”

Oral Roberts was buried during a private graveside service today. He is survived by his daughter and son-in-law, Roberta and Ronald Potts; son Richard and daughter-in-law Lindsay; 12 grandchildren and several great-grandchildren.