

FUNERAL HOMILY FOR FR BRIAN LARKEY

I think it was some time in the latter part of 2013 I received a message to call Fr Brian Larkey at his retirement unit at Baulkham Hills. When I returned his call Brian indicated that he wanted to come and see me in Parramatta to talk about a project he had been working on for some years. When I arranged a time I inquired how he would get to the Chancery and he told me he would organize a taxi. I indicated that I could arrange transport, but he insisted on the taxi which he informed me would also take him back! When Brian insisted it was wise not to disagree! I realized that his visit to me would be of some significance. Upon arrival he presented me with a printed publication and a CD Rom of his collected homilies for the three year cycle of the lectionary that he had accumulated as he said in its introduction over a three year period, but in reality was the result of a long ministry over many decades. Brian asked whether I would make them available through the Diocesan website so that they might be more accessible to those seeking resources that might illuminate the Word of God.

It was a generous offer and subsequently I had his homilies put up on the Diocesan website. This incident very much reflects the disciplined and measured character of Fr Brian Larkey. Being true to form you won't be surprised to learn that Brian meticulously planned this Mass of Christian Burial, to the design of the booklet, the placement of photos, the music, the scripture readings and the prayers. He even instructed me as to the appropriate and generous remuneration that should be offered to those he said who are to assist at the Mass (there was however no mention of the celebrant or preacher!)

It has often been said that you can gain a particular insight into someone if you peruse the books in their library. Brian had an extensive library and when he retired he gave the entire collection to our Diocesan seminary now located at Harris Park to which he was very committed and supportive. His intention was to divest himself of what material goods he had so that he could offer himself for service as a supply priest across the state. I am told he had a car specially designed where all his personal effects could be accommodated – in reality a mobile priest's home! Sadly, after only one expedition bad health intervened and the

post retirement plans were brought to a sudden halt. With no library to survey I was left with Brian's choice of two hymns and the scripture readings which might provide some insights into his self-understanding as a priest and his priorities in ministry. Our entrance hymn with the text by the famous Australian hymn writer of the post Vatican era, James McAuley has at its heart the action of Christ in the Eucharist. Life broken and lost, but restored through the action of Christ – here is revealed the priest whose life is centred on the Eucharistic sacrifice and so succinctly expressed in the refrain: "By your priestly power O risen Lord, all we lost and needed is restored, God in our communion be adored." The portion from St Paul's second letter to the Corinthians presented a quandary. Here Paul addresses the tension of being caught up in this world and facing the restraints of human existence whilst at the same time longing for unity with Christ. The end of the passage is a sober reminder of the reality of judgement, not exactly a popular theme in homilies these days, but nevertheless an inescapable fact for those who would seriously seek to follow the way of discipleship. Brian was

obviously patently aware of this reality. No wonder he chose the responsorial psalm *De profundis*

“Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord!” This psalm of lament is punctured by the refrain that acts as a counter balance – “I hope in the Lord, I trust in his word” Once again Brian brings us back again to the importance of scripture as a source of consolation in the bleakness of life. The Gospel passage forms part of the Last Supper discourse in St John’s Gospel, a passage which is I think the most frequently chosen Gospel at a funeral Mass. Why? Is it the promise of the “many rooms” or Our Lord’s promise that he will come and take us with him? Or is it rather the sixth of the seven “I am” statements of Jesus that pepper this Gospel. “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.” Brian’s life as a priest was founded on his being identified with the person of Jesus – that should come as no surprise – for each priest is called to configure himself to the person of Christ. No doubt during the thirteen appointments he had and the pastoral relationships that he formed this constant call to reflect Jesus Christ came into sharper focus. As each priest knows there are significant challenges in those relationships that

are formed in the crucible of parish life; they can often lead to misunderstanding and hurt, and can result sometimes in a burdened heart. During his time at Glenbrook Brian embarked upon what many thought was an audacious project in the design and construction of a new Church to serve the lower mountains. There was much criticism (designing and building new church buildings can bring out the best and worst in people) but his vision to provide a worthy place for the celebration of the sacred mysteries in conformity to the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council has resulted in a structure that is arguably one of the finest contemporary church buildings since the Council. Fr Brian had obviously spent considerable time in researching and seeking with the architect to translate through stone and timber a vision of the Church militant that would provide a glimpse of the Church triumphant at the same time opening out to the beautiful Australian environment around it. Perhaps Brian understood that at its core this place must give visible expression to what is so profoundly expressed in the words of his second hymn choice from the Liturgy of Holy

Thursday: *Ubi caritas et amor Deus ibi est* – “Where there is charity and

love there the love of God abides.” And perhaps it is the last verse where we locate that manifestation of hope which prayerfully sums up our aspiration in living the Christian life: “Oh, lead us Master, by your saving grace, to where the blessed glory in your sight, there let us see and love you face to face, in everlasting light.”

Next Sunday is the Third Sunday of Advent, *Gaudate* Sunday so called from the first words of the Latin introit - I would like to leave the last word to Brian who wrote for this day, in reference to the epistle: “There is a famous phrase in this letter which has become over the ages the primary goal of the true and good disciple; ‘Make your own, the mind of Christ Jesus.’ ... This hymn goes on to express a statement of Christian faith and it is very satisfying to us, who live so long afterwards, to that we are still sharing the same faith with those of the early church are the passage of all those centuries. This knowledge is one source of our conviction that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah and should therefore be a source of joy and satisfaction to each of us.”