

Canon Brian Murphy-O'Connor

23rd February 1930 – 11th June 2012

Homily preached at his funeral on June 20th 2012

Born : 23rd February 1930 in Reading

Studies :Venerable English College, Rome : 1947 – 1954

Ordained : 1954 in Rome

Served in : Newport 1954 -1963; Shirley 1963 – 1967 as assistant priest

Served as parish priest in : Cove 1967 -1973; Reading (English Martyrs)1973 – 1980; Ascot 1980-1992; Bournemouth (Sacred Heart) 1992-1998 ; Brockenhurst 1998 till retirement in 2004, which was spent first of all in St Joseph's Basingstoke and latterly in Winchester where he died on June 11th 2012. He became a Chapter Canon in 1991.

Looking at Brian's CV, with its list of seven parishes, in two of which he served as assistant priest, we could be tempted to think that it represents a relatively ordinary outline of priestly ministry which could be shared by many. But, as is so often the case, the bare facts do not do justice to the man and do little to reveal the richness and character of Canon Brian, whose memory we revere today and for the repose of whose soul we are gathered to pray.

My first encounter with Brian was, I think, in Ascot, where he was parish priest when I arrived in the diocese and, on that occasion, not untypically, he was in an arm chair and engaged in his daily tussle with the Daily Telegraph crossword. Subsequently, as the years passed by, I came to know him much better and began to appreciate and value the qualities which made him the great pastoral priest that he was.

I may be wrong – and there are many of you here today who will know better – but I think that there were four great loves in Brian's life. They were his **family** – and it's so good that there are so many of you able to be here today; **the diocese of Portsmouth**, where he spent his entire priestly life, and the people that he served so faithfully in the seven parishes where he was appointed; the **English College, Rome** where he studied for the priesthood and where he was ordained in 1954; and **Lourdes**, to which he was hugely devoted, together with a wholehearted commitment to all the sick, the brancardiers and handmaids to whom he ministered with such joy and effectiveness for many years.

The Gospel that we've heard today contains some of the hardest sayings of Jesus as he puts before his disciples the demands and challenges of what it means to be numbered among his followers and fellow workers. I don't suppose any of us would be brash enough to claim that we could tick all those boxes and Brian would probably, with characteristic humility, not lay claim to any of them. But you, and countless others, who have either gone before him to the Lord, marked with the sign of faith, or who cannot be here today, would tell his story differently.

I want to pick out four of those blessings of the Lord which I think apply particularly to Brian.

He was possessed of a **great poverty of spirit**, not so much in what he possessed in the way of material things, though he enjoyed them all when they came his way, but, rather, in his recognition of his own human frailty and in the courageous way in which he came to terms with that frailty, turning it, in the end, into a great strength which was such an inspiration for many.

He was **gentle** in manner with all he met but it was the gentleness that stemmed from an inner discipline which he had needed to discover and adopt for himself in times of adversity. From his gentleness, there arose reserves of **patience, tolerance and understanding** particularly for those who were not the easiest of colleagues to work with. And from his tolerance and understanding, there emerged a simplicity – a **purity of heart** – which was full of the mercy and love of God.

Committed as he was to the priesthood, the celebration of the Eucharist was always central for him and, even in the ill health that accompanied his days of retirement, he was always to be found in Basingstoke or Winchester celebrating or concelebrating with his brother priests to whom he was devoted.

He was a priest who inspired devotion and, in death, he leaves behind him many people who loved him in life and who owe much of their faith and its practice to the gentle ministry that he offered to them in his pastoral work which was always so intensely personal.

Throughout his life, in good times and bad, he was held by the good Lord who, as St John reminds us, “lavished great love on him as a chosen disciple” and this was what he was. St John writes of our futures as not yet being revealed, but Brian’s future is now his present. His gifted and faithful life has brought him to the kingdom of the Lord where now, we pray, he can assume the likeness of Christ and see him as he really is. This is the reward of the good and faithful servant, except that Brian is no longer ‘servant’ but the ‘friend’ of the Lord and one of those to whom the secrets of the kingdom are even now being revealed.

We pray today that Brian, now “ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven”, will experience the fullness of the love of God. May his soul and the souls of all the departed, through the mercy of that same great and loving God, rest in peace.

Bishop Crispian Hollis