

FR. TOM DUNNE RIP

TRUST IN THE LORD FOREVER FOR THE LORD IS THE EVERLASTING ROCK. Today we bid farewell to a dear priest of our diocese, Fr. Thomas Joseph Dunne: may he rest in peace. And we think immediately of those who will miss him most: his family from Ireland, some of whom are with us today; Ana his dear niece; Clare who visited him much these last months; the staff of Marie Louise House, Romsey, where he was cared for superbly; and his former parishioners from Milford-on-Sea. In this Mass, which we offer for Fr. Tom, that IN THE LORD'S OWN HOUSE HE MAY DWELL FOR EVER AND EVER, we also pray for you that the Lord will GIVE YOU COMFORT as you WALK IN THE VALLEY OF DARKNESS.

In that 2ndR, St. Paul speaks about the wonder of faith in Christ: that WHEN WE WERE BAPTISED IN CHRIST JESUS WE WERE BAPTISED IN HIS DEATH so that as Christ WAS RAISED FROM THE DEAD so we TOO SHALL RETURN TO LIFE WITH HIM. As a priest doing baptisms, Fr. Tom would often have recited those words. They would have been read 88 years ago when he was baptised. One of 9 children from Clane, Co. Kildare he entered the Irish Christian Brothers, and at one time was head-teacher in a parish school. But he felt called to the priesthood and so in 1959 he went to All Hallows, Dublin, from where in '64 he was ordained for the Diocese of Port Pirie in Australia. He served there as a curate in a very spread-out parish with a Mass Centre 100 miles from base. Wearied with travelling, not too good in health and missing home, he eventually asked to be transferred and joined our diocese in 1973. In his letter of commendation, Bishop Gallagher from Port Pirie said: "He is a good and zealous priest but he started in these parts too late in life!" Fr. Tom became a curate here in Winchester under Mgr. Mullarky and then he was sent to Bournemouth. But at long last in 1979 he became a parish priest at Milford on Sea, which he loved serving for 20 years until he retired in 1999. I didn't know Tom myself but I did have the privilege of visiting him in hospital in Southampton and giving him the last sacraments. People tell me he was a very likeable character. As Bishop Warlock put it: "He gets on well with other priests and with the people".

YES IT IS TRUE. THE LORD HAS RISEN. HE HAS APPEARED TO SIMON. In a Requiem Mass, our prayer is three-fold. First, we thank God for the gift of our loved one, for having known Fr. Tom, and for all we received from the Lord through him. We are also praying for his repose. None of us is perfect in life, and like the rest of us, Fr. Tom would have had his faults and failings. This is why it is crucial when a Catholic dies that a Mass is offered for their repose. This is what we are doing now for Fr. Tom, as we ask the Lord to forgive him his sins and to receive him into heaven: he whom He called on earth His friend and His priest. And thirdly, we pray for ourselves left behind, we who will miss him. Fr. Tom lived a full, varied and busy life, with so much in it. Yet so too do we, and time is passing by. When we lose someone close to us, even our parish priest, it makes us think of our own curriculum vitae and where our lives are going. So in this Mass, as we thank God for Tom, and pray for his repose, let us also pray for ourselves, taking the opportunity, like the disciples in today's Gospel, to realign our direction of travel with that of Christ. Indeed, may we too one day merit to hear the words that we pray Fr. Tom is now hearing; WELL DONE, GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT; COME AND ENTER THE HAPPINESS OF YOUR LORD.