

The Memorial Service for Brian Mayne – 19th January 2013.

Wisdom 3: 1-9; Psalm 42: 1-7; 1 Peter 1: 3-9; St John 6: 35-40.

Brian loved this place. He had a great sense of location in any case, whether the pause of a comma in a sentence or a bookmark in a page, the position of a server or priest in the sanctuary, the moment for a candle to be lit or a prayer to be said, the time for the mention of a name or the space for silence. This Church which successive clergy have found to be a cherished incumbency, a house of God that feels older than it is, has a sense of the numinous; is it the dark of the stained glass, the lighting, the warmth of the brick, or rather, is it the prayers of those whose faithful devotions have been uttered in voice or contemplated in the heart for more than 100 years? Brian would sit, his limbs wound around him, his chin maybe cupped in a large palm, his eyes set in the mid-distance as if penetrating what may be seen but not seen, known but unknown, the reasoning heart drawn to where he was happiest when starting the liturgy, preparing for that which he had technically supervised, but was now devotionally living. That, before anything else that I may say in this address is what I would want to hold before us this afternoon, beyond all that he achieved, which was much, before the value of his writing, his guidance to those whose knowledge and experience of liturgy, New Testament Greek, parish management, pastoral work and many another thing, was less than this; before any of these things, was Brian's clear and unassuming apprehension of the Divine in worship as "a member of Christ; the child of God and an inheritor of the Kingdom of Heaven." Brian was these catechetical assurances personified in the reality of his life as that of the baptised; he epitomised how the renewal of Christ's life within grew and grew through his ministry and the striving to be the disciple he knew himself called to be.

It is not without good reason that Brian asked for the readings he did for both his funeral and memorial service, I am sure that they were not lightly chosen; they speak of testing yes, but also of assurance; the pouring out of the soul; the willingness of the committed, God-fearing (in the right sense) person to the way of the Cross; but note the little runs of life that flow through the lessons, for that is what they are, from the Wisdom reading and Psalm 42; the "sparks course through the stubble", "the longing for God" as a deer for a water brook; movement again you see; more fire from Saint Peter; the refining of gold from his Epistle, bursting uncontrollably through the gradual hymn; the lines of which are to any priest almost tangible in their sensitivity; in their intensity; the fire is kindled in the heart; the burning within of the Spirit's power and love; that love is surely what produces the trembling return to the source and the inner appeal, which for the priest is his or her life: the call to guard the flame; "till death thy endless mercies seal." The focus of the fire and the longing and the refining is, of course, Christ, the Bread of Life. Sixteen times in the Gospel we have just heard, Our Lord says "I" or "Me" always in relation to the Father or to the one drawn, by spiritual thirst or hunger to the living

God. Christ the one who unites in life and in death the servant of God with his heart's desire, in him, through him; with him.

When Brian occupied this pulpit he did so, with ease, with the sense of being at home; he was nostalgic for the place of his early training in the ways of the Christian life. He spoke often of reading morning or evening prayer in this Church, of its sense of presence, of his confirmation, his preparation by Norman Kelly, his love for what was of the tradition of Anglican devotion; but, and this is the point I laboured just now, he internalised the outward form in a way that left him ever susceptible to the Spirit's promptings; stirrings; the Spirit's fire burned brightly throughout his life; but let us mark these trembling beginnings. Then so much changed. The searching of a young man leading to ordination; the challenge of his first curacy in Ballymoney; the eye-opening joys and sorrows that are not always recognised for what they are until later. In his memoirs, Brian speaks of living for three years in the town without ever meeting the Roman Catholic Parish Priest or his curates – the strangeness of this only apparent later when ecumenical relations became what we would consider today to be normal, remarking that it is “scarcely believable”. The move to a second curacy at Knock and from that place of happy memories for more than one clergy family, he moved on to Knocknagoney and then to Belvoir – the core early days of his life as an incumbent were in demanding new places with the chance to establish new communities of faith; new structures of working and parish life in days of great change in the Church and society. Brian, and in due course Valerie and their daughters, were part of those exciting days of re-development of Church life against a backdrop of his own maturing as a priest and liturgist, a man of study and hard graft; his memoirs do not shirk the trials nor elaborate the successes. It was tough, but exciting – I sometimes wonder how many of us active in the Church's ordained ministry today could cope with the demands that he and many of his contemporaries faced.

Bishop Harold spoke at Brian's funeral of the area of his life of which, publicly, he would be widely known, namely his work both nationally and internationally in the revision of the liturgy of the Church of Ireland, leading to his crucial role as editor of the Book of Common Prayer 2004. Numerous other books grew from this area of his life too, including his own memoir, published soon after his retirement, “Changing Scenes”. In re-reading this book last week, I was struck by how far the Church of Ireland has further changed in the past ten years since it was published. Brian has continued to be part of that process and his love of things technological allowed him to keep well in touch with all that has grown from the liturgical developments of recent decades. His many contacts and friendships established over the years of lengthy meetings and conferences and the respect in which Brian is held are a testimony to the tireless work and endless enthusiasm, of this man, for excellence in worship married to a well-grounded knowledge of the ways of the Church over the centuries. Yes,

his enthusiasm was generated from a love and fascination for his subject, but the whole Church has benefited from that patient commitment to the work of a man for whom short cuts and under-preparation were anathema. The curates and readers that he trained will bear witness to the discipline and sense of duty that make their demands, but have shaped and helped them as Christian ministers.

Brian's time as Dean of Waterford was relatively short, but I believe highly influential for him as he encountered both opportunities and problems which were quite different to those in his Belfast parishes; his adaptation to the ways of Waterford and his contribution to the development of new parochial and diocesan structures must have given him much food for thought and prayer; but then came the return to the North and to the Lecale Group of Parishes; this proving to be the longest single position that Brian would hold in the Church of Ireland. Once again he relished the opportunity to bring the fruits of liturgical development to bear as the many years of experimental services were brought to fruition in the APB; but parochial structural matters were key too, as well as teasing out a relationship with the Dean of Down, when Brian had himself been a Dean not long before. He seemed to be working hard at the way liturgical change is introduced – by now he was very experienced – but it is not easy, though as he himself remarked, “There is obviously something in the way the priest presides which helps”.

Which naturally enough brings me back to the point at which I began; Brian had long before taken that step which is so hard for clergy in their early years to climb; being able to lead worship but at the same time be entirely caught up in worship oneself; to be conscious of what is happening in the liturgy beyond the words, movement, music and structure; the secret being so carefully prepared – and we all do this differently – to arrive at the greeting “The Lord be with you” totally engaged, reliant on others fulfilling their place and without a worry that anything will go wrong. For nine years Brian helped me here when not taken from us by Down Cathedral (his other liturgical home) or by another Parish in Down Diocese, and during the interregnum his service to Saint John's was greatly valued and needed; bearing in mind both of the facts that he had a fifty mile round trip to get here and was frequently unwell or receiving treatment. I know how much this Parish values the work of this last stage of Brian's active ministry, but then Brian loved this place.

I prepared this address listening to Beethoven – not my favourite composer – but the late quartets are something very special; one particular movement, the Lento in D flat of the Quartet Op. 135 is especially lovely, tranquil; in fact it is sublime. This was one of the last pieces Beethoven composed, he died nine months later; he was already deaf, yet he has produced a simple quartet of subtle beauty, though this composition of genius he never heard. As I played this over and over, whilst tapping away on my laptop, it occurred to me just to what

extent we are called upon to make many of the steps we do in life and ministry by allowing them to, as it were, sing in our heads, fall into place prayerfully, internally. This is something I believe Brian was very good at; he could see how the words on a page would become worship with the right attention; how a curate's practice might be improved by discipline in other areas of life; how relationships may be helped through the right mutual effort or plan; how pastoral attention or teaching may reap its benefit years, maybe decades, later. His legacy will live on.

Yet it is in the simple things of faith and practice, the essential elements of priesthood that hold the key to living the life of the disciple. Saint John's placing of our Lord's teaching on the Bread of Life so early in the Gospel, and apart from the Lord's Supper, allows us to read it both eucharistically and non-sacramentally as well, linking it to the feeding of the five thousand and Jesus' walking on the Sea of Galilee. The Anglican insistence on Word and Sacrament, with clarity holding both in a rounded liturgy that flowed and led, the positioning of seasonal material where it had its greatest effect on the overall service, the linking of different elements into a unified whole, were all places where Brian had strong and informed views, and the rest of us have benefited from them. He was in fact one of the most influential clergymen of his time; not in the headlines or the headlights, but in the hearts and minds of those whose friendship of Brian they greatly valued, or whose lives continue to be marked by his gift to them of kindness, compassionate advice in adversity or difficulty, and guidance through - what sometimes we imagine are the complexities and mysteries of - how to simply open one's heart to God.