

HOMILY FOR VIGIL MASS FOR FR BILL JORDAN

MONDAY 12 AUGUST

ST BRENDAN'S CHURCH, FLEMINGTON

'Our father is dead; he has vanished from our world like the morning sunshine and many hearts long that his great life should flood with its brightness the memory of generations to come, and indeed of those still living for whom it shone in all its splendour'.

So wrote the Cistercian monk Walter Daniel in the Middle Ages as he began the biography of his friend the Abbot. He could have been writing for us; he could have been writing about Fr Bill Jordan. It was said recently at the funeral of a Melbourne priest that no one can have as many friends as a diocesan priest. That was certainly the case with Fr Bill. Look around you this evening and think what might be tomorrow. How many people, how many generations of families have said over the years, 'We know Fr Jordan'. Bill was like a biblical patriarch, the father of a great people. Known, loved, admired and respected. The descriptors flow easily – kind, gentle, humble, dedicated, prayerful, conscientious, gifted and generous. The diocesan priest belongs to many families. In recent days, I have come to meet members of the Jordan and Watson family. He was your flesh and blood, you loved him dearly and now cherish those memories. But Bill also belonged to the family of the Church, a talented priest of the Archdiocese of Melbourne. Bill belonged to the parish family of St Brendan's for 25 years and Holy Rosary for 10 years. He belonged to numerous families that had the privilege of Fr Jordan celebrating a baptism, wedding, funeral, blessing or memorial Mass. Fr Bill belonged to the family of liturgical music across Melbourne, Australia and internationally. A few months ago, Fr Bill and I took Fr Francis out to dinner to celebrate Francis' anniversary of ordination. Three quarters of the restaurant greeted Bill warmly and affectionately. Yes, it is correct, no one can have as many friends as a diocesan priest, in particular this diocesan priest, who has been called home by God following a brief and unexpected period of illness.

A few months ago, former Melbourne priest and journalist Dr Michael Costigan wrote about his time in Rome during the Second Vatican

Council. I quote, 'A day to remember ... I am informed in the Press Office that Archbishop Mannix was dead ... I go on the back of the Vespa with my student-priest friend Bill Jordan of Melbourne to the Requiem Mass for Archbishop Mannix at the Blue Sisters chapel for 5pm. Great turn up of bishops and others'. You can imagine the two of them hooning around Rome like something out of 'A Roman Holiday!!' Bill loved his time in Rome and, there for the Council, developed a love for all things Italian, in particular music and the liturgy and the Church's rich liturgical theology and practice. Let me state for the historical record that Fr Bill Jordan belongs to an exceptional generation of priests. They were young men who were formed in the traditional Anglo/Irish Catholicism of Australia who then traveled to Rome. But they didn't just come back with academic qualifications. They come back with a new heart and a new mindset. Priests like Bill immersed themselves in the culture of festas and devotions, of rural village life of the 'paese' or town. Bill came to a rich understanding and appreciation of Italian traditions, customs, festas and devotions, their stories and legends, their myths and superstitions, the stuff that shapes a culture, a people and a story. Others in the past may have denigrated these traditions but not Bill Jordan. He was at home in this world and his Italian friends were equally at home with him. They considered him 'un padre di famiglia', the father of our family. His Italian apostolate commenced soon after his return from Rome where he was stationed at West Melbourne for 13 years and this dedication to the Italian apostolate continued into retirement. There were times I was convinced that Bill was more Italian than the Italians!! But it wasn't just Italians. At both St Brendan's and Holy Rosary, Fr Bill was a friend to families from Malta, Vietnam, East Timor and in recent years, families from Africa. Like yesterday's second reading, Fr Bill Jordan was like Abraham, the father of a great people.

Bill considered his time in Rome a great blessing. He used these gifts and talents well in the Archdiocese of Melbourne, nationally and internationally in the field of liturgical music. As we gather here, a publication is being launched in Germany that features an article written by Bill. He had so many friends and associates in the field of liturgy and music – priests, professors, composers, talented musicians, religious men and women, the list goes on.

As much as we admire these gifts and talents, at the end of the day, Fr Bill Jordan was a priest of Christ and a servant of the Church, a diocesan priest called to feed, nourish and strengthen God's people by word and sacrament, called to bring God's loving and healing grace to those crucial sacramental moments of life, moving easily and gently between English and Italian and a few diverse dialects for good measure! He loved parish life, he loved pastoral ministry, he loved being a diocesan priest living out the precise words of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel – being gentle, poor in spirit, comforting those who mourn, being merciful, a peacemaker. This is the 'job description' of a diocesan priest and Fr Bill Jordan was a perfect fit.

As you know Bill had been struggling in intensive care for a number of days. He died on Thursday 8 August, the feast of Australia's great and only saint, Mary of the Cross MacKillop. In his last days, Bill had certainly endured the cross. Now that he is free, he has returned to the Father's house to share in that wonderful communion of saints that he believed in so fervently, praying in faith that a special place is reserved for him after a wonderful life of priestly service. We all hope that God takes away his diary!! We all know what Fr Bill's retirement strategy was, even though it may have cost him his health; it went something like this - 'A priest is not available, there is a pastoral need, I'm free, put it in the diary'. There is no need for him to do the festas; it is time for him to enjoy that wonderful and joyous and festive communion of saints now and forever.

Fr Bill Jordan was a man of the Church and a priest of the tradition. Let me conclude with the words of Cardinal Newman:

May he support is all the day long, till the shades lengthen, and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed and the fever of life is over and our work is done. Then in his mercy, may God give us a safe lodging and a holy rest and peace at the last.