

MONTH'S MIND: Rev. Fr. Bill JORDAN

It is still hard to believe, and accept, that he has gone. But Fr Bill has passed on after the crucifixion of his final illness. He is at peace. God called him and he is with God. He has fought the good fight; he has won the last race.

Our last family contact with him was an sms text, probably the last text he ever sent, congratulating Maria and myself on the birth of our first grandchild, Ryker William. He would have been pleased with the name; and he would have baptised him in a few weeks' time but that will not be. His text added that he was in hospital "with a nasty chest infection". His condition deteriorated within several hours and he was transferred to Melbourne Private's intensive care ward which he never left.

I was privileged by Bernard, Rosemary and the Jordan family to be asked to be a pallbearer. As we wheeled his coffin down the centre aisle for the last time, my abiding memory was of so many people quietly crying and sobbing, their faces lined with tears, faces from many corners of the globe, faces of people who loved him, faces of people who were his friends, faces of people whom he had helped, faces of people whom he had led in their personal journeys of faith towards God.

He was loved, and he inspired goodness in others. Since his death, there were so many stories, especially through the online network of Corpus Christi seminary where his colleagues and peers expressed universal admiration for Bill Jordan. He had no critics, no enemies. One told how in 1962 he had left the Corpus Christi seminary never to return. And he went tripping around Europe and ended up in Rome where a contact had alerted him to Bill Jordan whom he had never previously met. Bill put him on the back of his famous Vespa motor scooter and for three days showed him the sights of Rome, St Peter's Basilica, the many churches, the Roman ruins, the art galleries and so on. This man who became a senior administrator at Melbourne University subsequently followed Bill's career around the inner suburban parishes of Melbourne. However, he never met Bill again but he was always appreciative of Bill's hospitality and care in 1962. One small act in a lifetime of so many other acts of service!

Other stories from his seminary colleagues were appreciative of the fact that Bill sometimes, in the interests of pastoral care, would stretch - rather broadly - the laws of Mother Church with regard to weddings either in the Church or outside it. Other stories came from Tobin's, the funeral directors down near the entrance to the freeway, who spoke of how caring he was during funerals, especially at times when deceased people had no relatives or friends or were too poor to afford a proper funeral. As one Tobin official said, "he could never say 'no' to any request".

The final set of stories comes from the members of the St Vincent de Paul Society. They tell of how in their visits into the high-rise flats and elsewhere Fr Bill's Vinnie friends would speak warmly of how generosity and care, and how much he had helped them. And it is fitting that the \$2,000 raised in memory of Fr Bill will be partly used in the "Assist-a-Student" educational scholarship program to assist seven students-in-need for two years so as to break the cycle of poverty.

He was a true pastor. He was a man for others. He was a man for immigrants and refugees. Across the world, the Church is a great mystery, full of saints and sinners. Within that mystery, Bill Jordan was the model and exemplar of a good priest, widely acknowledged as such by his fellow priests and by his good friend with similar interests, Archbishop Denis Hart. During the funeral Mass, amidst all the billowing smoke and incense, another very close friend, Geoff Lock of the Australian Opera, expressed the depths of his friendship when he sang with exquisite feeling, "Do not be afraid, I am with you; I have called you by your name, you are mine".

William Anthony Jordan was a man of God, a man of the Church and a man of music, sacred and classical. And we hope that there is music in heaven, heavenly music, beautiful music, triumphal music.

In his 25 years, he left St Brendan's parish in a financially secure position; he renovated this huge church, twice having it painted; he put in the glassed-in section at the back; he built the alcove section here to the side; he oversaw the changes to the schools and the kindergarten; most importantly, he brought together St. Brendan's and Holy Rosary in a successful amalgamation. He has left a rich and enduring legacy.

In 2009 at the time of celebrating his 50 years of priesthood, the parish gave him the plaque which now hangs above the front internal door, recording the names of all its parish priests. Future generations will know that, in the 122 years of the history of St. Brendan's parish till now, he was the longest serving parish priest, beating Fr. O'Dwyer, who was parish priest from 1926 – 1947.

In concluding, at the time of the parish centenary in 1991, Fr Bill was interviewed by Mick Scholtes. In a long interview, he said, "A priest's life is made possible only by the help of many, many parishioners, people who open or clean the church, all those who volunteer their services in one way or another around the place. The parish priest is more than a sanctifier; he is not a sacristy person; he is not just a person to look after the sacraments. He can be involved in so many different facets around the area (of Flemington and Kensington). That is why (priesthood) is such a thrilling life and I recommend it to anyone who would like to do something for the Kingdom of God".

Professor Des Cahill,

Parishioner, St. Brendan's parish, Flemington.