

Funeral Mass for Father Paddy Tuffy

Church of the Holy Family, Kilglass.

April 19th 2018

We gather to commend Father Paddy to the mercy of God, to thank God for the gift of life to him and the gift of his life to us and to all those whom he met along the long road of life given to him. And his life was a long one; almost ninety years. More than anything else, I think the reading from the Book of Wisdom express his attitude to that long life; 'there is a time for everything'. Today is the time, unfortunately for the fallen leaf, a time to weep, a time to mourn but a time also to remember and harvest all the good works of a life honestly lived. Therefore, while we gather in sadness we also gather to celebrate a long life, well lived.

I have taken as the Gospel reading for our Mass, the Beatitudes. I feel that they sum up the life of Father Paddy.

When Christ sat on the mountainside and shared with his disciples his vision for Christian living he could have had Father Paddy in mind. Poor in spirit, he lived simply and never had any interest in or concern for money or worldly possessions for himself. Gentle by nature, he showed gentleness at all times in his love of his family, his concern for those entrusted to his pastoral care and especially for the marginalised and those most in need of support. His years as an Emigrant Chaplain in London and those spent in Inver, Ballina, Easkey, Belmullet, Ballycroy and Killala bear testimony to this. A comforter among mourners, his quiet, kindly presence was a great support for many who suffered bereavement. He was principled almost to a fault when it came to the cause of right and he was strong willed in this regard. For example, he had a strong belief that priests should be able to retire at seventy and, despite being in good health at that time, he stood by this. Gifted with energy and good health he then went to work in Orlando and Los Angeles for a number of years. He was a man of the deepest integrity, which is a Christian quality not easily or often found in today's world. He committed himself to the Pioneer movement as a young priest and he never waived from this; wearing the Pin until he no longer could wear a suit. Merciful, he constantly showed his concern for people with a unique kindness. I visited him less than two weeks ago, when his speech had almost failed him, and all he could say to me was 'thank you - thank you'. And he held that gratitude in his heart for all those who cared for him, especially his family, his carers and his friends. He got to know his parishioners in a genuine but understated way; always holding their interests close to his heart, especially in prayer. Pure of heart and a peacemaker, he lived out his priesthood in this diocese by ticking all the boxes of the eight beatitudes.

His spirituality was that of the diocesan priest and he was one of its greatest examples. His life and his priesthood was in fact founded on the old Latin adage of 'mens sana in corpore sano' - a healthy mind in a healthy body, as he lived out a healthy balance between prayer, work and recreation. His whole prayer life was anchored around saying Mass, reading the breviary and praying the Rosary. And from that source came his strength in ministry. From this still point, this rock, he was then able to spend himself in the service of the people committed to his care. His work ethic was strong and his determination to do what he considered right was his guiding principle. For example, when in his view proper, modern accommodation for priests needed to be provided in parishes, he built new houses in Rathlee, Ballycroy and Killala. In this area, he had an eye for the practical and his judgments stand the test of time.

Father Paddy was very much a priest's priest. He saw the importance of priests being together, especially in the challenging circumstances of today, to support each other. He loved the company of priests and drew great personal strength from being with his brother priests. And if I may, I would like to mention Monsignor Gallagher, his first cousin, in this regard and Monsignor Killeen,

who, unfortunately, can't be with us today. He loved sport and was a natural athlete, swimming and playing golf for as long as he could. As a priest or bishop, if you wanted good advice, balanced judgment and a listening ear, you went to Father Paddy. He was indeed a good shepherd, a genuine priest and a real example of pastoral care.

Christ never promised that life would be easy for those who based their lives on the charter of the Beatitudes. The three words he used towards the end of his reflection are strong and hard by any standard; 'you will receive abuse, you will be persecuted and all kinds of calumny will be spoken against you on my account.' They are a follow on to his repeated warning to all those who become his followers; "If you want to be a disciple of mine, renounce yourself, take up your Cross every day and follow me". The hard lesson of being a Christian, and in particular of being a priest in today's world, is that suffering always walks by your side and the Cross is never far away. But equally so, is nearness of the promise of the Resurrection. No matter how much we try to, we cannot separate suffering from our Christian calling or try to understand suffering except in terms of our Christian vocation. Father Paddy carried the cross of illness with great faith and a quiet resignation for the past number of years. As his mobility declined and his dependence on others for care increased, he put into practice an awareness of the redemptive aspect of suffering which was truly inspirational and heroic; based as it was on his own deep spirituality as a priest. He never complained and was always grateful.

But Christ did not end his vision for the Christian life with words about hardship. He went on to end his Beatitudes with words of hope; "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven; this is how they persecuted the prophets before you".

Father Paddy will be remembered for the outstanding witness which he gave to the charter of Christian living outlined in the Beatitudes during his life and especially during the almost sixty four years of his ministry in this diocese. As time goes by and we remember acts of kindness, acts of courageous witness and the little things which are personal memories to each of us, his commitment and witness will endure. And while these days are marked by sadness, we remember and apply to him the last words of Christ in the Beatitudes; "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in Heaven".

Finally, I have a feeling that the quiet man we are commending to God's mercy might want to have the last word. Being the modest, understated man that he was, I think he would want me to end by quoting the words of the Lord in the parable of the dutiful servant in St Luke's Gospel; 'And so with you when you have done all you have been told to do, say 'We have done no more than our duty.'. Paddy, rest in peace.