

## **HOMILY AT THE FUNERAL MASS FOR FR JEROME O' HANLON MSC**

PREACHER: PAT COURTNEY MSC PROVINCIAL

The Scripture Readings chosen for Fr. Jerome's funeral Mass are rich in hope and promise.

The first reading from the prophet Isaiah reassures us through the biblical image of banquet that all peoples' deepest desires will be realised. "On this mountain the Lord of hosts will prepare for all peoples a banquet of rich food... he will remove the mourning veil covering all peoples; he will destroy death forever. Freedom from death and from all the limitations associated with mortality will give Way to joy and exultation, hence the reading ends with the words; "We exult and we rejoice that he has saved us"

The second reading from the first letter of St Paul to the Thessalonians continues the same theme of hope, and promise: "we believe that Jesus died and rose again and that it will be the same for those who have died in Jesus. God will bring them with him....we shall stay with the Lord forever, with such thoughts as these you should comfort one another". We also note his reference to grieving, that we do not grieve about those who have died, like the other people who have no hope." He did not say don't grieve but don't grieve like those who see the grave as the end of life.

The Gospel reading from St John likewise offers us reassurance. "I am the resurrection and the life. If anyone believes in me even though he dies he will live, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die".

This proclamation of the Word of God to us today as we say our last farewell to Jerome is our comfort, our consolation and our hope. Yes of course we are sad at this parting, our hearts are heavy, we hold so many fond and treasured memories of him, his humour his sociability, his wide ranging interests in life his support, his, wisdom, his advice, his encouragement, and not least his example and inspiration as friend and priest. His passing will undoubtedly leave a void and in this vale of tears we invite the Lord's word to light up our steps. Jerome had a profound respect for the Word of God.

Jerome was born in Gurteen Lombardstown Co. Cork on the 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1922. His parents were Daniel and Eileen. He was the first child in a family of three boys and two girls.

He received his early education at Ballyhass National School, Castlemagner and his secondary education at the Sacred Heart College here in the Western Road, Cork. He entered the novitiate of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart on the 13<sup>th</sup> August 1940 at Crosshaven, Co. Cork. He made his first profession of vows in the congregation on 13<sup>th</sup> September 1941.

He was ordained a priest on the 29<sup>th</sup> June 1947. His first years of priestly ministry were in Ireland, as bursar in Moyne Park Co. Galway and manager of the Annals Office at the Western Road.

In 1951 he was appointed to England where he served for 29 years in parish ministry in Saddleworth/Uppermill, St Alban's, Herts, and St. Albert's, Liverpool. In 1980 he returned to Ireland to become local superior of the community here at the Western Road and Parish priest of the Parish. In 1986 he became hospital chaplain at St Fin bar's Hospital a position he held for eleven years, until 1997, when he retired from

full-time chaplaincy. Since then he has resided at the Western Road and made himself available for supply work.

Jerome was a big man of great strength and stamina. Many anecdotes abound about his use of his strength whether in the playing fields or elsewhere.eg. The dances in St. Alban are where e had at times to deal with fisticuffs. He was a man of great principles and integrity, a wonderful worker, a man for others possessing a deep concern for others, caring. Nothing was too much for him. His generosity was exemplary.

He had a very keen intellect, a great reader, always striving to improve his knowledge and understanding of issues. He kept himself updated in many fields of learning – in world affairs, theology, spirituality, the church and he had a great feel for liturgy. He built a very beautiful church at St. Albert's in Liverpool; the comment of the late Archbishop Derek Worlock when he came to open it in 1977 was "liturgically perfect".

He was a man with a passion for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This entailed for him interiorizing the values of the Gospel, the attitudes and sentiments of Jesus and modelling his own living on them. Hence his deep conviction about the Neo-catechumenate. He saw in this movement a powerful way of owning the message of the Gospels and reproducing the values of Jesus Christ in individual, family and community living. He was convinced of its potential to transform and deepen his own faith and that of others. Hence he was very devoted to the neo catechumenate and gave much time to it.

Jerome had a great interest in all sport, a skilful hurler and gaelic footballer in his younger days. A true follower and supporter of the red and white jersey. He was a good man to analyse a player or team's performance, never shirking to declaring his hand or making his mind known about them.

He promoted GAA when he served in St Albans. In his memory the O'Hanlon cup competition is a very special tribute to his involvement and promotion of the Gaelic games.

He was very active in his work for Irish emigrants in Britain, and for many years afterwards many people spoke with affection of his support for them when they often felt exiles and lonely in those days of the fifties and sixties.

He also found time to pursue his interest in race meetings and having an occasional flutter on the horses and dogs. He prided himself in being a good judge of form. Cheltenham was always a sacred week!

Throughout his life Jerome maintained a very close relationship with his family for whom he had a deep affection, visiting them regularly. He was deeply interested in their wellbeing and welfare. He participated in so many family events and occasions down the years.

He was profoundly aware of his mission and committed his whole life to it - to lead others to the Heart of Christ. This he would accomplish through preaching the Gospel, celebrating the Eucharist and the Sacraments, the witness of his own faith and prayer life, and his solidarity with the people...Jerome was a man of courage, conviction and deep faith and these gifts, together with his admirable spirit of self sacrifice, ensured he would be there for his people, to serve and minister to them Through Jerome's ministry and service for and with people they experienced the love of Christ for them as something very real and tangible, which would touch them and bring hope, promise, and meaning to their life situations.

As we bid our final farewell to JEROME with pride, we remember him fondly as a most engaging and caring person, a dedicated priest, a loyal friend.

As we mourn his leaving us in death, it is important that we all remember we are a people of faith, hope and promise. The liturgy of the funeral mass is alive with the promise of new life. The Scripture Readings leave us in no doubt that death is the gateway to our true homeland, the passing over to true and lasting peace –“the souls of the virtuous are in the hands of God; no torment shall ever touch them; they are in peace”. In the Gospel, Jesus says to us: “Do not let your hearts be troubled; there are many rooms in my Father’s house. I am going now to prepare a place for you.” In death we share in the new life of the risen Christ. Life is changed, not ended as our preface prayer of the mass reminds us. Yes in death there is closure to our earthly life and pilgrimage. It is harvest time, that reaping time when we pass from our journey of faith to the Thabor experience of seeing Him face to face, immersed in his glory. The psalmist assures us that “ those who are faithful will live with Him in love”.

For Jerome his earthly journey has come to an end. He has left behind a rich harvest, the full extent of which is known only to the Lord and the many people enriched by his life and work. He devoted himself heart and soul to the Lord. This gave meaning and inspiration to his life.

When he met the Lord in death, Jerome, as he did in life, offered everything to him. The following reflection captures this theme of offering.

“Oh I will set before my guest  
The full vessel of my life  
I will never let him go with empty hands.

The entire sweet vintage  
Of all my autumn days and summer nights,  
All the earnings and gleanings of my busy life  
Will I place before him  
At the close of my days  
When death will knock at my door.

May he have eternal rest.