

HOMILY FOR FATHER EAMON CLARKE

In the Gospels, Jesus is described in various ways and given numerous titles. Just this past week we have been focusing on the Good Shepherd.

Today's Gospel, telling the story of the road to Emmaus, helps us to focus on Jesus as the teacher. We are told that as he walks along with his disciples he explains things to them, opens the scriptures for them and breaks bread with them. This teaching aspect of Jesus' life was very dear to Father Eamon's heart. The Emmaus Gospel is a beautiful meditation on the Eucharist, but it also helps us to focus on some vital elements of the Priesthood. Like Jesus, in this Gospel passage, the Priest is asked to walk with his people, to explain the scriptures to them and to break bread for them.

It is often said that you always remember a good teacher and certainly Father Eamon Clarke is remembered as an excellent teacher and preacher. Many have spoken of his excellent sermons and feeling that they were listening to a person who had many years of learning at his fingertips.

Most of Father Eamon's priestly life was spent working with teachers and helping to train them. His twenty years at Newman College saw him influence many teachers, breaking bread for them, explaining the scriptures and showing them the importance of learning.

A number of people have spoken of his infectious love of philosophy and theology. They have also spoke of his ability to remember birthdays and anniversaries and to always send a card or make a phone call. He surrounded himself with books and even in retirement has over twenty thousand volumes. They were never just ornaments and were constantly referred to.

It is good to think that these books now bequeathed to others, will continue to educate and inspire and will continue his work of preaching and teaching long after his death.

His wide range of interests in history, literature, theology, philosophy, classical music, film and opera meant that he could draw on a rich store for any of his talks and sermons. He was always anxious to encourage lay people in the knowledge of their faith and always invoked the English Martyrs as great examples of Priests and lay people working together as witnesses to the faith. He was one of the first Priests in the Diocese to promote the Ministry of Deacons and you can see the fruit of his labour today in the Parish.

His view of the Church was never insular and he could analyse political, social and ecclesiastical changes in an insightful way. Whenever you visited Eamon, you never had to worry about the conversation drying up or embarrassing silences. Just a few days before he died we were treated to his analysis of the 1916 Easter Rising and its continuing influence on modern day Ireland.

Today's First Reading reminds us that the Church is never to be insular and that God does not have favourites. We are commanded to go out and to proclaim the good news.

Father Eamon was happy to do this with all sorts of people and he used philosophical and theological skills to proclaim the Gospel. In these days of religious extremism and social upheaval, having a wider view is always important.

Eamon was an obedient Priest and always felt it was important to go where he was asked and even if situations were difficult. He approached each appointment with determination and intelligence.

He always enjoyed the company of his brother Brian, perhaps one of the few people who could match him intellectually and they enjoyed holidays together and when Eamon became more housebound he enjoyed Brian's visits from Spain. It was providential that Brian was here with him at the time of his death.

Eamon was always grateful for visits during his retirement and was helped by his Secretary Rhona Barry for many years until her passing and in recent times by Anne Hall and Mary Prescott who looked after him week by week. He was also grateful for the regular visits from Deacons Pat and Gerry.

At heart, Eamon was always proud of his Dublin roots and spoke often of his parents Andrew and Elizabeth and his regular visits to the Quays in Dublin which was the Book Shop quarter of the City, but for the last sixty years has made this Diocese his home.

He loved quoting Irish literary figures particularly the Dublin Literary set.

I would like to finish by quoting a poem by Oliver Goldsmith from Roscommon. In it he speaks of a school teacher with a love of learning who was much admired. It captures Eamon well.

*“Yet he was kind or if severe in ought,
the love he bore of learning was his fault.
The village all declared how much he knew,
t’was certain he could write and cipher too.
While words of learned length and thundering sound
amazed the gazing rustics gathered round
and still they gazed and still the wonder grew,
that one small head could carry all he knew”*

We were all amazed at how much he did know and our prayer for him today should be that his mind will be filled with the glory of God's revelation in heaven.

Eternal rest grant on to him