

FR ADRIAN CONVERY'S FUNERAL

"You too must stand ready because the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."

These words from today's Gospel struck me immediately as so very appropriate and at the same time so very important. Fr Adrian had no idea that somewhere between 6.45am and 8.00am on Thursday 8th February that this was the day, this was the appointed time when he would pass from this life to eternal life, the eternal life that had been given to him in baptism, but in a quiet way this is what he had been preparing for all his monastic life. Indeed, he was preparing to get up and pray the Divine Office and then join the community for Conventual Mass. God, however, had other plans and he would join the community but, in another choir, in another place.

One of the things that I shall miss, are the comments that Fr Adrian would often make after a funeral. He always liked to share his opinions and inevitably he would find a time to say, thank you for the homily, usually adding: *"But I wonder what you will say at mine!"* Well, Adrian, you are about to find out!

How do you begin to capture a life of 92 years, 82 of which had been spent in this valley, 75 as a member of the monastic community? During his time in community, he had undertaken so many different assignments: Monastic Choirmaster, teaching in the College, Housemaster in St Oswald's, Headmaster at Gilling, monastic Guestmaster, school Guestmaster, Sub-Prior, Chaplain at St Benet's Hall, Chaplain to St John's House. Alongside these varied tasks he was cantor, organist, participant on schola trips, made many friends, and was a renowned raconteur. He carried a huge amount of history, some of which was re-arranged in the telling, but nonetheless told with conviction and great authority.

Fr Adrian often referred to himself as *'just a simple monk'* and I used to tease him by saying *"Did you say sinful or simple?"* To which he would reply, *"You know perfectly well what I said, but both are true!"* A simple monk who loved his music, enjoyed his trips to Louth and abroad, especially Austria, and kept in touch with family and friends. Yet there was a basic truth to his being a simple monk. He had, of course, his human foibles, but there was a gentleness, humility, good humour, and fidelity to God. In one sense he died as he had lived. Quietly, without too much fuss but certainly leaving his mark and making a notable exist.

It is to the Gospel and its clear instruction: *"You too, must stand ready"* that I want to draw our attention today. The death of anyone reminds all of us of where our ultimate destination is, indeed, what our unique purpose is in life. While those who do not believe in the communion of the saints and eternal life are left with *'memorial services'* at which long eulogies are given to rehearse the life and achievements of the deceased, the liturgy of the Catholic Church speak clearly and beautifully. It reminds us of where and on whom our attention should be fixed.

We are here not to laud and praise Fr Adrian, who was only too aware of his need for mercy, as well as the contribution he had made to many people's life and the community that he loved. We are here to pray for him. To offer the great sacrifice of the Mass so that he will enjoy the banquet of heaven that Isaiah prophesied, and that Jesus gave to us in the Eucharist. We are here to sing the praise of the God who had bestowed many blessings upon him. A praise he entered wholeheartedly into through his love of music and his faithfulness to the Divine Office and the Mass, which always point to our homeland, which is heaven.

His long years of monastic life had taught Fr Adrian a crucially important truth. A truth he had heard read so often from the Rule St Benedict: *we should keep death before our eyes; we should remind ourselves that we are going to die* (RB4:47). This is not a morbid truth, nor a call not to appreciate and enjoy life, no one could accuse Fr Adrian of not doing that! Rather we hear in this teaching rooted in the teaching of Jesus to seek first the Kingdom of God, an invitation to face the eternal reality: While the mortality rate for each one of us is 100 per cent, the immortality rate for each of us is also 100 per cent. Death is a fact, but it is not the end. I think of words of St John Henry Newman:

"All those millions upon millions of human beings who ever trod the earth and saw the sun successively, are at this very moment in existence all together...at this moment, where God has assigned them a place."

Fr Adrian knew this simple truth: we will die, but death is not the end, so the fundamental question is are we ready, are we prepared for the gift of heaven? We do not need, therefore, to dread death because it is our faith that through baptism we have already been born into eternity. Eternal life is not a long off event that comes when we die. Eternal life is a reality we choose to live now. We do not need to live in fear and terror of death, no matter how far we may have strayed from God. We will always experience mercy if we ask with sincerity.

This beautiful liturgy of Christian burial reminds us at so many different points that Jesus has released us from the fear of death, through his own life, death, and resurrection which we participate in especially through this Mass. He has opened heaven for us. Quoting St Paul the Catechism explains:

"Because of Christ, Christian death has a positive meaning: "for me to live is Christ, to die is gain."...What is essentially new about Christian death is this: through Baptism, the Christian has already 'died with Christ' sacramentally, in order to live a new life; and if we die in Christ's grace, physical death completes this "dying with Christ" and so completes our incorporation into him in his redeeming act." (ccc100)

You will hear this proclaimed clear in this Mass: *'Lord for your faithful people life is changed not ended...When the body of our earthly dwelling lies in death, we gain an everlasting dwelling place in heaven.'* When we know that death is not the end, when we know death is simply the beginning of everlasting joy, everlasting life, and everlasting communion with the One who is love, then hope drives out fear and sadness. Here is

the point, it makes us ready, it makes us long for death, because we long to get on with the rest of our life in union with Jesus in a world where there is no suffering, no pain, no loss. Yes, there will be no Country Life magazine and Times crossword puzzles, but who needs them when you have Jesus!

The desire to experience the vision of God, to be fully alive, in body and spirit has shaped Fr Adrian's life for 92 years. He lived with death before his eyes and the hope of heaven all these years. He is now in eternity. If we truly appreciated him, we would not want to simply remember him for what he was but pray for him to enter fully into what God intended for him from all eternity. I cannot overstate the importance of our prayers for those who have died. This day is not about our grief, but about the action we can take to assist Fr Adrian on his final journey to God.

We were created for life. We were made to experience joy. And Christ, that life and joy, will be ours just as it is Fr Adrian's now. Death brings the fulfilment of that joy and life, but we can live that now no matter what our present situation. If we are in Christ, we have nothing to fear. Well done Fr Adrian, you have taught us by your death the most important lesson could ever teach. To be ready, to live the hope that fills us, the hope of eternal life.

Abbot Robert Igo, OSB

Ampleforth Abbey

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