

Father Patrick Malachy Kilgarriff

When Father's family asked me to write and deliver this eulogy, I was at the same time very honoured and a little taken aback because eulogies are so often delivered by family members. But then it came to me that like so many of us here today whom he lovingly served as Father we are also members of his family. We knew his sister Breda and husband Gerard on their frequent visits and of course Gerry, Alish, Martin and Donna and Cathy and Dave who are with us today. We know also joining us in spirit and prayer on Zoom from Canada are his great niece and nephews, Siobhan, Pearse, Matthew, Aidan, Ciaran, Conor, and Brendan. Father's constant family updates were interlaced into many a sermon and kept us all up to date with family life in Canada, especially when he returned from visiting them all. His love and pride in his family was evident for all to see as was their love and care for him. As Father to us, he knew his sheep and his sheep knew him. His flock extended to the whole of Sidmouth as was evidenced by whenever he walked down a street. To him Father was not a title or mode of address it was quite simply a way of life. In fact, it was only in retirement that he became Fr Paddy because during his pastorate he was simply Father. His knowledge of people and his memory are legendary. If a job needed doing, he rang up the right person, whether

parishioners or not, practising or not or just someone he had met or he knew their mother. Conversations would run like this.

“Hello, I need so and so doing can you be here by two today?”

Not today Father I am very busy!

I need it done today so come around two.

Today is difficult Father.

Righty Ho two it is.

See you at two Father”.

All said with disarming Celtic charm that was impossible to resist.

There was little need to budget as the parish usually showed an annual surplus of around £20K so the only real decision was whether to invest it or donate to a worthy cause. As an example, when he commissioned the window in the Lady Chapel, he arranged for the same amount of the cost to be paid to some missionary Sisters to finance a dispensary in Africa. The window is a perfect example of his piety laced with his irrepressible sense of humour by including Rollo his beloved cat within the setting. Parishioners will remember Rollo asleep in the crib most Christmases. When Bishop Christopher was due to call, Father remembered that we had not asked permission to erect the window so when he showed the bishop, he quoted

the Jesuit saying, *“that sometimes it is easier to beg for forgiveness than ask for permission”* Bishop Christopher laughed so much that as usual Father got away with it.

Coming back to those sermons, he had a novel way of keeping his congregation on their toes by periodically firing questions to either an individual or in general. This habit of congregational participation in sermons has continued to the surprise of many a visiting priest. Father would also recognise returning visitors or former parishioners and welcomed them by name during Mass. And what child in the parish can ever forget the giant pile of Mars Bars kept in the sacristy for distribution at any time?

It was during one of our last chats that I asked him for some biographical details for his forthcoming Platinum Jubilee and as sharp as ever he rattled off his details so I can share with you that Patrick Malachy Kilgarriff was born on 27 October 1927 in Ballaghadereen, County Roscommon in Ireland to Martin and Ellen, who already had a daughter, Breda born in 1920. After junior seminary, young Paddy went up to All Hallows Seminary in Dublin, run by the Vincentian Fathers. He was ordained in the college chapel on 21 June 1953.

Once ordained, Father Paddy travelled to Plymouth to spend 5 years as a Cathedral curate. This was followed by curacies at Teignmouth, Tiverton, Sidmouth, and Branksome in Poole. Father then went to Lynton as Parish Priest, followed by Ilfracombe and finally Sidmouth in 1979 until his resignation from active ministry in September 2002. At his retirement party where incidentally so many people wanted to come that we had to hire the whole of the then council suite many presentations and tributes were paid, but the most memorable was from the Anglican Rector of Sidmouth speaking on behalf of all the town clergy. The Rector pointed out that Father was the longest serving Minister of Religion in the Town, widely respected by his brethren all who regarded him with love and respect as their elder brother.

While in active ministry Father Paddy was for many years Chair of the Trustees of the Plymouth Diocesan Clergy Fund, Diocesan Organiser of the Propagande Fide Red Box scheme, the longest serving Governor of St John's School in Sidmouth and chaplain to the Sisters of the Assumption until the convent closed. After retirement, Father stayed on in Sidmouth continuing to use his considerable pastoral gifts as a supply priest, hosting a prayer group and always welcoming the many who knocked on his door or rang him up. It would be wrong to think that the great love and affection for Father was confined to those of us who knew him as our parish priest. As part of his Platinum celebrations parishioners were invited to write into a

memory book and the many tributes from our more recent parishioners shows that his love and influence never stopped until the day he died. Recently Father moved into Roselawn where he was lovingly looked after and where he still extended a warm welcome to those who visited him and exercised his Sacred Ministry as far as he was able. Many of us are familiar with Father's favourite prayer which we often recited with him and begins.

"God of my life

I welcome this new day.

It is your gift to me.

A new creation

A promise of resurrection."

So, it was on 2 July Father welcomed a new day and the gift of his promised resurrection into the kingdom of Heaven. Thank you, dear Father, and friend, for touching our lives and showing us in the words of the Prophet Micah which you so often quoted to us here on earth!

"Teach me in the confusion of my days the things that really matter".

and again.

" What is good and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God."

Here was a man who not only preached the Gospel but lived it. A true priest and shepherd in the mould of St John Mary Vianney, who like Father Paddy smelled of the sheep long before Pope Francis advised all priests to do likewise. Throughout his priestly life for me he embodied the hymn “Brother, Sister let me serve you”.

“Let me be as Christ to you.

I will weep when you are weeping.

When you laugh, I’ll laugh too.

I will share your joy and sorrow.

Till we’ve seen this journey through”.

His loving pastorate has not ended but now continues elsewhere as he continues to pray and interceded for us all from his heavenly perch.

We are all the richer for knowing him and the poorer for losing him but inspired by his example and memory we all better prepared to persevere and carry on with our own earthy journeys.

May he rest in peace and rise in glory.