

A Tribute to Bishop Patrick O'Donoghue

Given on Sunday 21 May 2017

The Celebration of his Golden Jubilee of Ordination as a Priest

Bishop Padraig - back on 25 May 1967 you were ordained priest for the Diocese of Westminster in St Michael's church Analeentha. Like Abraham of old, you had already left your own people and journeyed to another to make it your home. When you chose as the first reading from Genesis for the day of your ordination, that goes – "Leave your country and your people" - you had no idea how prophetic, how concrete those words would continue to be in your own life. The call was God's will and you obeyed that call, no matter where it led you – as Assistant Priest in London, on the Westminster Mission Team for Cardinal Heenan, Pastoral Director at Allen Hall Seminary, Sub-Administrator at Westminster Cathedral, Rector-back at Allen Hall, Administrator back at Westminster Cathedral, and then Auxiliary Bishop to Cardinal Basil Hume and then as Diocesan Bishop in your own right – as Bishop of Lancaster from 2001 to 2009. Then returning to his beloved County Cork in so called 'retirement' in Bantry, West Cork serving as Assistant Priest and Hospital Chaplain there, then on to Ballincollig and then to Nazareth House, Drommahane.

You have always taught us that the Church and her ministers should not seek to be self-referential concerned with our honour, power and clout, property and prestige but a Church that serves. The Church really has no treasure but her faith in the Lord, as we say with Peter and John in the Acts of the Apostles, "***Silver and gold we have not, but, what we do have, we give: ... Jesus Christ...!***"

Of course, there have been many serious moments and dramatic decisions, diocesan-reforms made and documents written by you. Thankfully though, there have been lighter moments too! I was reminded by Bishop Campbell's opening comment in his Mass homily earlier how I have often joked that Bishop Padraig's auto-biography would be released by the ironic title: '**Stuck for Words!**'

There have been times too when words were just too much. One such case was the story on the hottest night of the year, in his Apartment in Lancaster, the Bishop met with a lady to explain some project or another. It was the end of a long day – little-by-little the Bishop felt himself fading away. Sometime later the Bishop awoke to find this same lady opposite looking straight at him. Composing himself rather quickly he went on to ask her:

Have I been gone for long?

Yes, Bishop Patrick, you have never been afraid to appear more vulnerable in front of your flock. Even as you didn't take yourself too seriously you've certainly 'fed the sheep' too, you've taught the nations. I remember us walking along the harbour in Sydney, Australia (for World Youth Day there) with you to meet, by chance, some young Dominican Sisters who greeted us and saying: **"You're the Bishop who writes those wonderful (Fit for Mission) documents!"**

You've championed aloud the migrant and the asylum seeker (long before Pope Francis), looked out for the poor and - true to your motto: 'Blessed are the Poor' - even shared in their life somewhat – when you found the cupboard in your own Diocese was truly bare!! You have poured out your life for the addict, the homeless – you were instrumental in the founding of the Cardinal Hume and Passage Centres in Westminster and a Cenacolo community in the Diocese of Lancaster in 2004! You played a leading part in keeping our schools strong in their Catholic identity – you were called before Parliament as a result - and worked to make our parishes fit for the mission of evangelisation. You have proved to be a man with a heart strong enough to carry the pain of brother priests and free enough to welcome our joy.

My Lord, I am honoured to have been ordained a priest by you in 2001 – and all the more blessed to have served you as your Secretary and to be part of your so very fruitful ministry. We

can only do what you have done – and say: **‘This is what I was asked to do.’**

When we think of Bishop O’Donoghue– we think of that ‘irrepressible’ Bishop who famously loved to ‘pop in’ on the priests on a Sunday afternoon, or his famous vocabulary – the words **“hugely important”** or **“tremendously fabulous”** never far from his lips, we recall his rather polished Cork-cum-Kensington accent or that he wouldn’t give it a second thought to offer a full medical diagnosis of a sick parishioner or priest – even on the telephone. We recall with grateful affection those dark shiny grey suites that would so often shun a Roman cassock ‘any ways up’. Those scuffed shoes and the spilled fountain-pen ink all over his mitre. Or those calls of self-invitation to a presbytery or convent at about 11.00am to say he would like to meet with Fr X:

**“It will be late morning by the time I’ll be with you. “
“Oh, great, I would love to stay for lunch.”**

Seriously my Lord, you have always reminded us that even in the difficult days Christ remains powerfully active and present in His Church as the faithful whisper their prayers, clamber to worship at Sunday Mass, struggle with sin and pursue virtue, hungering all the while for the Gospel and the Church’s Sacraments. Today, we can but only - thank God for you and for your fifty years of priestly service for your great fidelity, fearless stamina in Westminster and then in Lancaster, your deep humanity and always good humour; all signs to us of the Lord’s ever-assuring care for us in His Church.

We thank God, too, for Bishop O’Donoghue’s family and many friends who the Bishop clearly loves and cherishes so very much, the Sisters and staff at Nazareth House, Drommahane who take such great care of him - for all the care and steadfast support they give to the Bishop day by day.

Meanwhile my Lord Bishop Padraig, you have done the Church proud and, in turn, it has truly been a privilege to serve you so

closely. You do indeed possess the humility and peace of a bishop, priest and disciple of Jesus who looks out still - not with fear or regrets but with hope and anticipation to meeting Jesus, the Lord of life.

Bishop Padraig, you know we value you, delight in you and we wish you every happiness and blessing in the years ahead. Thank you for being yourself – never sitting on your dignity. Thank you for your witness to prayer, for your wisdom and inspiration – you are a Shepherd who knows the smell of the sheep so surely – and, as a priest and bishop has always been so very close to them – so very close to all of us!

Ad multos Annos Bishop Padraig – many more years!

***Rev R Billing, BD (Hons), STL
Bishop's Secretary***