



21 May 2013 - **Brother Anthony C.Ss.R.**

29 November 2013 - [The Kilt Altar Cloth](#)

Brother Anthony loved all things Scottish, and he had a collection of kilts worthy of a Black Watch drum major. He looked very dashing in the full outfit. Some time after dear Anthony died, my sisters Ellen and Mary came down to visit and kindly cleared out his room, taking what they could to the local charity shops. It's funny how the remains of a life can so quickly be reduced to a collection of black bags. We kept his kilts aside and Mary took them with her back to Donegal in Ireland, "to do something with them."

Then the involved process: cut the kilts, unpick the folds, steam clean, shape into patterns, design, sew, back with wadding, and finally quilt the whole piece. She is wonderfully skilled at this craft.

The final outcome looks beautiful and makes an original altar cloth for our little house chapel at St Clement's - which has to be one of the smallest chapels in the UK, with space for a congregation of five. I think the kilt altar cloth is a fitting memorial for a wonderful Scottish confrere, who can remain close to us in spirit during our celebration of the Eucharist.



In 2008 dear Brother Anthony was called out of retirement in Perth, Scotland, to come down to the new Redemptorist house in Chawton, Hampshire, and be cook and companion. I had just been appointed as the new director of Redemptorist Publications. Anthony came gladly and was a wonderful friend until his death, at 79 years, on May 20th at Basingstoke Hospital. He was a superb cook, and he always said that on his gravestone he would like the words engraved: "He could do a great soup!"

He went to the local Sainsbury's in Alton twice a day, his real cathedral, to attend his devotions of buying food "for the Fathers" as he would always say. One visit would have done, but Sainsbury's was his little way of getting out of the house and he found it difficult to walk far from his beloved Volvo. He would buy Scottish products if available - only Highland Water and Scottish beef and Scotch whisky - always with an eye to a bargain. One day when he brought back Tony Blair's autobiography, I asked him who would read it. He protested, "But it was a bargain at half-price!"

He was very proudly Scottish and close to his large family. The only paper he really read was the *Sunday Post* and he had an undying love for mince and tatties, although his own version of Scottish steak pie had to be tasted to be believed. He owned wardrobes of kilts - the picture above is of him and my sister Ellen in St. Clement's here in Chawton. He was always gracious to visitors, ensuring they were welcome and well fed. If he got tired entertaining, he would shake his head, adjust both his hearing aids, and disappear upstairs in search of unneeded batteries.



In five years living with Anthony, he was never moody or distant: he had a lovely kind disposition, always ready to excuse people, a man of unflinching good humour. When he smiled broadly, it looked like he had rented the sun.

In my trips abroad he would readily drive me to the airport at speeds that could not be caught on camera. On 15 February, on my return from Rome, Anthony was not at the airport at the usual pre-arranged place. Suddenly there was a large absence. He had taken to his bed, afflicted by severe pneumonia. It was the beginning of his last journey. His local doctor advised me to keep him at home. In the weeks ahead, Anthony was a good-natured patient, having to endure my dreadful cooking, which he tried to eat, always without complaint. After a while I noticed that his clean plate was clean because he had moved most of the meal to the bin by his bed while delicately covering the leftovers with kitchen roll.

For the last six weeks Anthony has been in three hospitals. The consultant in the ICU unit in Basingstoke, five weeks ago, told me that Brother Anthony could not survive outside the hospital because his body was too fatigued. His judgement proved all too true. The kindness and care he has received from the NHS has been simply superb - especially the nurses (mostly immigrants) who treated him with heartfelt tenderness.

The day he died I was with him from 4 until 6:30, and he seemed to be regaining a bit of lost ground. He was aware he was slowly dying and asked me if he would be missed. Then suddenly, through the oxygen mask, he prayed the prayer of his childhood in a loud voice:

*Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray the Lord my soul to keep,
If I die before I wake,
I pray the Lord my soul to take.*

And then he added, "But not yet." And smiled his broad smile and told me to go home, waving his hand. He then lifted the oxygen mask and kissed my hand. I wish I had read the final signal and stayed. How stupid was that?

Not long after I returned home the hospital rang to say Anthony had taken a serious turn for the worse and they were making him comfortable. Christine Thirkell, our financial controller, very kindly drove me back to the hospital. Jim McKell, Anthony's brother, was already there. Sadly we arrived 5 minutes too late.

Brother Anthony put up such a brave fight against the inevitable. He was a truly wonderful kind confrere.

He has no idea how much I will miss him. What was it a poet said? "One person is absent; the world is depopulated."

God keep dear Brother Anthony in his everlasting embrace.