

Homily - Br Glyn's Funeral...

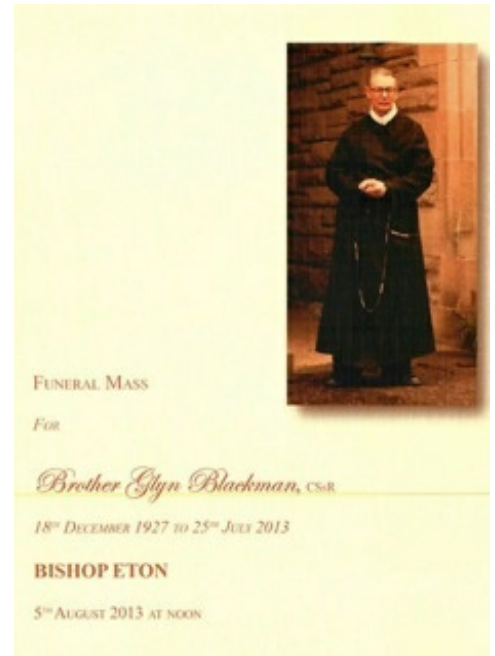
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BRO GLYN'S FUNERAL HOMILY

There are times in life when our encounters with one another seem to carry particular significance, and for me, getting to know Glyn Blackman would certainly fall into that category. We need to go back to the first two weeks of May 1978 and visit the eastern valleys of Wales, where Fr Gerry Costello and I were giving a mission in the parishes of St Francis, Talywain and St Felix, Blaenavon, which lie north of Pontypool, a town famous in those days for the front row of the Welsh Rugby team. Among those who attended the mission morning and evening was a quiet, unassuming, middle-aged man, who eventually introduced himself and asked for a chat. He had taken note of the fact that I was the vocations' director and he asked me how he should go about joining the Redemptorists. Following the way the Lord used to work, I suggested he should 'come and see' and stay with us in Sunderland and he duly did. Glyn fitted in from day one and as they say the rest is history. By the autumn of the following year he had entered the novitiate in Plymouth and he made his profession on 20th September 1980.

At the time of the mission Glyn was scurrying up and down the valleys mending people's television sets and generally sorting out their electrical problems. He brought those skills to the Redemptorists and I recall one of his first contributions in Sunderland was to install a new public address system in the church. I think Father Dickinson still swears it was the most effective system he has used anywhere during his priestly life. But Glyn didn't only bring his electrical skills; he brought his gentle patient spirit to Sunderland and to the other communities where he ministered during his Redemptorist life. As well as Sunderland he spent many years in Erdington and Perth and of course here at Bishop Eton, for the most part as the sacristan, meticulously caring for the church and ensuring that everything was in order for all the liturgies. To this day we have here in Bishop Eton a wonderful team of sacristans and I think all of them claim to be keeping the legacy of Bro Glyn alive.

Glyn evoked the affection and love of all those whom he encountered. I know that at the time of the mission in Talywain he had not long lost his mother, whom, like his father before, he had lovingly cared for in her old age. Here was a perfect illustration of the selfless and caring person whose life we are celebrating today. You have only to reflect on what a special brother, cousin, uncle and friend he was to the other members of his family and how they faithfully came to visit him when he could no longer visit them to see how important the family was to him and once again we are delighted that so many of you have been able to join us today. If you visited Christopher Grange in the last couple of years you will have seen how the Daughters of Charity, the staff and the other residents revered him... and I think that is the right word. They showed him reverence because he always showed them reverence. I feel privileged that I was able to help to arrange for Glyn to spend that last period of his life in that wonderful residence and nursing home. On behalf of his family and the Redemptorist family I want to say a huge 'thank you' to everyone who cared for him there from the day in January 2011 that Sue Hopkins came to Bishop Eton and assured him that she had a place for him in Marillac House. But even before then Glyn's health had begun to deteriorate and we in



the Redemptorist family will be forever grateful to Cheryl and the two Lynns for the way they so lovingly looked after his needs. I know they will always insist it was a joy because he was never demanding and always grateful. And our thanks extend to a number of the special friends whom he made in the parish and with whom he was able to relax and celebrate and who visited him in Christopher Grange in the last two years.

I never recall Glyn gossiping or adversely criticising others. He would always seek to affirm and reassure, which is quite something for any human being, let alone a Redemptorist. Indeed I have never known anyone who so perfected the art of affirmation. If he thought it would help, Glyn would always support your opinion, even when you knew for certain that he couldn't possibly know whether it was right or wrong! On the evening he died, the 25th of last month, I visited him at around 6.30 in the evening and anointed him for one last time. He was barely conscious but I sensed he was aware of what was going on and I presumed to ask him when he finally came face to face with the Lord to offer a little prayer for me, and I know I am not the only one who did that in those final days of his life. Of course we are not supposed to canonise people at their funerals, but I always remember Cardinal Ratzinger preaching at the funeral of John Paul II and reminding us of how six days before the Pope died he had stood at the window of the Apostolic Palace and given his last Easter blessing to the city and world. He went on: "We can be sure that our beloved Pope is standing today at the window of the Father's house, that he sees us and blesses us."

Our scriptures today enable us to do what St Paul told the Thessalonians: 'comfort one another with words of faith.' Isaiah has this wonderful vision of the Kingdom as a great banquet, where we celebrate God's triumph over all that distresses us and of course in Christ we see that vision being fulfilled with his gift of the Eucharist as a foretaste of all that awaits us. Like those disciples on the road to Emmaus you sensed that Glyn had not only recognised the power of God's word in the Scriptures and his abiding presence in the Eucharist, but that he lived and was transformed by them. Glyn was not a demonstrative man but he was a remarkably influential man. St Paul tells us that the life and death of each of us has its influence and many of you in this congregation can give witness to how Glyn touched your lives spiritually. Even as his health began to fail I know how he treasured the time people spent with him, reading spiritual books and praying and I sense that it was equally treasured by those who shared with him. All those memories and more will live on with us. There is no need for them to be just nostalgic memories because we can bring them to the Eucharist – as we are doing today – and they come alive again as living realities in the Lord. And the memories do not only have to be the spiritual ones. Glyn was a rounded character who loved life and he retained a range of interests in sport, current affairs, his beloved Wales and – we dare not forget – his trains. I too love trains but now I know what it means *really* to love trains and it was marvellous that while he was still able he had that wonderful trip and meal on the Severn Valley Railway with Ralph Heskett (now Bishop of Gibraltar) and the then postulants. I remember feeling very envious of them that day.

If John Paul was standing at the window of the Father's house, looking down and blessing the congregation at his funeral, perhaps it is not too fanciful to hope that Glyn is doing something similar. I think there is a general feeling that if he has been kept waiting, then the rest of us will certainly have to do our share of purgatory. Lord, we thank you for Glyn and all the blessings of his life. We ask you to forgive him his sins, heal any hurt in his life and take him to yourself. Eternal rest give unto him, O Lord...

Fr Timothy J Buckley CSsR