

Homily - Fr. James Corrigan Funeral

Published: 25 September
2015

Homily - Fr. James Corrigan CSsR Funeral...

FUNERAL OF FR JAMES CORRIGAN, CSsR

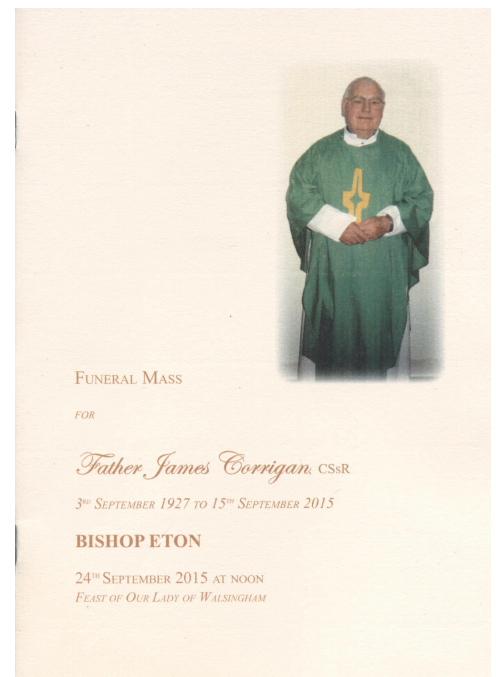
BISHOP ETON, THURSDAY 24 SEPTEMBER 2015 at NOON

HOMILY BY FR. TIM BUCKLEY C.SS.R

I have not had far to look for the connections which so fascinate me when I came to prepare these few words to honour the memory of Fr Jim Corrigan as we lovingly entrust him to the Lord today. Just three weeks ago to this very day, Fr Andrew, Fr Barrie and I went to Christopher Grange, complete with a cake, to celebrate Fr Jim's 88th Birthday. I don't think we were responsible, but that night he was in the Royal Liverpool Hospital, only to be discharged at lunchtime the following day. Sadly these breathless turns were becoming a pattern and a few days later he landed in Whiston Hospital. They kept him in for a few days, and it seemed that both he and the Lord had decided that enough was enough, so on cue on the night of the 62nd anniversary of his ordination he went peacefully to the Lord: it was the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows and today is the Feast of Our Lady of Walsingham. He would appreciate the connections: he had a great devotion to our Blessed Lady.

During these latter years of his life I felt especially privileged to be able to get to know Fr Corrigan better and better. In spite of his failing health and all the memory problems that sometimes come with old age, he retained a remarkable sense of equanimity and good humour. He never lost his interest in people and what was going on and he had that rare gift: an ability to rejoice in other people's gifts and successes.

Pope Francis is putting a tremendous emphasis on the importance of the Church being a place of welcome, a place where people experience the compassion of Christ. My experience of Fr Jim was that he was a man who naturally radiated that compassion because, like St Paul, he was conscious of his own human frailty and was able to sympathise and empathise with others. We found some notes that Fr Jim had written about his vocation and he mentions his uncle Bro Pascal visiting the family home in Paisley. Many of us here remember Pascal's wry, droll sense of humour. By contrast Jim was wonderfully self-deprecating and often enjoyed a joke at his own expense. Many of you know Cheryl and the two Lynn(e)s who do so much for our confrères when they grow old and sick. Like all of us, Fr Jim had a great affection for them and they for him. Cheryl, who is an early bird, would begin her day by checking to see that he was OK. One of her regular questions was whether he had managed a good night's sleep. She assures me that right to the end, whenever she saw Jim and asked him the question, in his gentle avuncular



way, he would take her by the arm and assure her: “Dear, you must know I have never had any problem either sleeping or eating!”

St Paul tells us that the life and death of each of us has its influence on others. Like Fr Andrew Burns – who mentioned the occasion last night – I first met Fr Jim when I was 13 and Fr Goodall brought me and a group of youngsters from South London to that same Vocations’ Meeting here at Bishop Eton during the Easter Week of 1960. Fr Jim was responsible for the Liverpool contingent and as the priest on site played host to whole meeting. I remember this first encounter well because it almost got me into trouble. My father had furnished me with a cheque to cover the cost of my stay and Fr Goodall instructed me to entrust the same to Fr Corrigan, which I duly did. However, in the succeeding weeks and months my father kept interrogating me because his bank statements showed no record of the said cheque. Eventually, I headed up to St Mary’s, Clapham, and pleaded with Fr Goodall to investigate the matter, whereupon the cheque was duly banked and I was exonerated. Fr Jim did have one or two other blind spots: I was highly amused last night, listening to his nieces describing the ruses they employed to try and avoid ever having to go out in a car with their uncle. I can think of plenty of Redemptorists who did likewise and the story of his bumping into a car four times in the Mersey Tunnel on his way to a school mission and then insisting with the irate driver that it was only three is part of the folklore of our Province.

Fr Jim may not have been the most organised of people or the best driver in the world, but if administration was not his strong point, he was blessed with more than enough gifts to make him a wonderfully compassionate priest and Redemptorist missionary.

His uncle, Bro Pascal, obviously had influenced the young Jim, because having mentioned his visits the next entry speaks of him going to the Juvenate here at Bishop Eton in the 1940s. After his novitiate in Perth Jim was professed on September 8th 1948 and he was ordained at Hawkstone towards the end of his studies on September 15th 1953.

Our Lord commanded his apostles to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth and Jim certainly responded to that mandate, stretching his wings far and wide during his 88 years. He obviously loved travelling, but it was a mark of his generosity of spirit that he willingly responded to the invitation of his superiors to go on missions that others may have been less enthusiastic to undertake. At home he spent many years in our communities in Perth (where he also served a term as Rector), Birmingham, and of course here in Liverpool, but he also spent three years working in South Africa and Zimbabwe. In the 1980s there was an SOS from New Zealand and he spent some years there helping to keep the Redemptorist charism alive. Towards the end of his working life he spent a year in the Orlando Diocese in America, before returning to Bishop Eton, where he helped out in the parish and in the local convents until his health deteriorated to the point where he needed to be cared for. As with Bro Glynn before him, the Redemptorists will be forever indebted to the Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul and their home at Christopher Grange. Unfortunately the sisters cannot be with us today because they have the funeral of their Sister Louise, who died the day before Fr Jim. We would like to thank all the staff of Marillac and especially Sue Hopkins, his great pal, and Dan who is also with us today, for their devoted care of Jim since early 2013.

When we listen to the prophet Isaiah inviting us to put our hope in the God who will destroy death for ever, we are at the same time invited to imagine the Lord of hosts who will prepare a banquet of rich food for all of us. Such is our understanding of what heaven will be like: the place where God will wait on us having redeemed all our pain and suffering. I would suggest most of us struggle to comprehend how all this will come about and we know we are not alone in that struggle. We see the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, bewildered at the events that have overtaken them and left them bereft and downcast. By inviting them to reflect on the Scriptures Jesus transforms their mood and opens their minds, and then he celebrates with them over supper. The Eucharist, we are told, is the foretaste of the banquet of the Kingdom of Heaven. When we face the death of those whom we have loved, the Lord provides us with the same opportunity to reflect on what all this about and where it is leading and as we gather round the altar today we have an opportunity to imitate the disciples and recognise the Lord in the breaking of the bread and see it as a foretaste of the Kingdom. Fr Jim faithfully celebrated this mystery throughout his life. In years of mission and retreat work in parishes and schools around the world he also helped others to open their minds to the mystery of God's love. I think we can be confident that now he is seeing more clearly than we can how that faithfulness will be fulfilled and rewarded.

Fr Timothy J Buckley CSsR

