

## HOMILY FOR THE FUNERAL OF FR ANTONY HAIN, OSB

28 FEBRUARY 2019

On behalf of Fr Abbot and of the monastic community I would like to welcome you all to this funeral Mass for Fr Antony. I welcome Ian, his elder brother and family members, who knew and know him as Stuart. And we spare a thought and prayer please for Joan, his mother, at the great age of 98 too frail to be here. I welcome friends and those who have known him here and in Fort Augustus. Our most important task, a very practical one, is for us to pray for Antony in this Mass, for the forgiveness of his sins and for his welcome into the Kingdom of Heaven. We give thanks for his life and for all that he has meant for us.

Today's first reading from the book of Wisdom speaks of those who experience disaster and apparent annihilation, who seem to endure punishment and affliction. Likewise the quotation from the letter to the Philippians, which is placed at the beginning of all our funeral booklets, speaks of these wretched bodies of ours. These words can apply to all of us, but the relevance to Fr Antony is unmistakable. Notwithstanding a happy family and childhood life, he developed in his early teenage years Lymphedema, and after several unsuccessful operations this remained to dog him, along with other related illnesses, for the remainder of his life.

Yet he held, as we should, to that hope which in the words of the Book of Wisdom is 'rich with immortality' and which hopes for blessing: 'Those who trust in him will understand the truth, those who are faithful will live with him in love; grace and mercy await those he has chosen'.

Then in today's Gospel we hear of one who, at his Second Coming and at the moment of our death, comes like a thief in the night, like a burglar who breaks in unexpectedly: 'Happy those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. I tell you solemnly, he will put on an apron, sit them down at table and wait on them.'

This passage too seems to fit with Fr Antony's passing, which was in the night. He was half getting out of bed, when he died; a natural explanation of this would be that he woke up, felt ill and moved to get out of bed. Yet his poise and expression,

so characteristic of him, could bear a deeper meaning that he was welcoming someone, as his soul neatly and courteously left behind his body in response to an invitation: 'he will sit them down at table and wait on them'.

In that poised, neat and courteous departure, Fr Antony leaves some very particular memories behind him. For his family, there is the remembrance of a devoted son, a loving, caring greatly revered and respected nephew, brother, brother-in-law, uncle and great-uncle to his family here in this country and in Australia.

We, his monastic family, remember with gratitude his years of faithful and prayerful observance first in Fort Augustus and then, from 1999, here in Ampleforth. We remember his suffering borne with fortitude and with a characteristic smile, caught on his prayer card. Despite his difficulties he had managed to study English and Theology at Lampeter and as a monk – he entered the Fort in 1975 – he taught and was a Junior Housemaster. Here in Ampleforth he was a House chaplain for a time and worked in the Abbey shop. He also performed a number of jobs, which do not earn so many plaudits, looking after the community's mass intentions, car bookings and counting Sunday mass collections.

We remember his expertise in cross stitching, a hobby and a bit more than that maybe, as he often said that much of the burden of pain and discomfort was removed from him while stitching. We also see here his meticulous carefulness, his neatness, his attention to detail.

We remember, both his family and his monastic community, his, in Ian's apt words, 'penchant for "one liners"', with again that humour and trademark smile, an innocent yet shining look in the eye. With meticulous care, he kept his homilies in a lever arch file in reverse chronological order. They number in the hundreds and with a very great range of distinctive punch lines. This is just a small selection: 'families are like fudge – mostly sweet with a few nuts'; 'Only Robinson Crusoe could get everything done by Friday'; 'We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give'; 'Yesterday is history, tomorrow is mystery, today is a gift, that's why it's called the present'; 'Nobody ever ruined their eyesight by looking on the bright side of life'. Thank you Fr Antony.

He particularly suffered in this past year with the development of epileptic fits. Although it proved only a temporary remedy nonetheless his operation in Hull did bring him some real relief and we all noticed a change. When he was recuperating in York hospital I visited him and asked him how he coped with all the noise of

the hospital and without the correct volume of the Breviary, which we only got to him subsequently. He answered that he practised the remembrance of the presence of God and felt him, despite his affliction, his circumstance and his longing to return to the monastery infirmary, very closely. The last time I saw him alive in the monastery infirmary, he was praying his Breviary.

I do not think he needs more of my words. He has left his own best remembrance and it tells us what we need to know. It is there right at the top of the pile of hundreds of homilies and I am going to end by quoting it in full. It is a little 'fervorino' for the feast of St Mary Magdalene:

Putting to one side the silly novels about her, the Gospels tell us all we need to know about St Mary Magdalene. Walking away from her old life after being freed by Jesus from "seven demons", in gratitude what could she do but follow him. And follow him she did – to the Cross, when most of the other disciples had disappeared, and then, early on that Sunday morning, to the tomb, expecting nothing but sorrow, but, instead being recognised by name. We too can be recognised by Our Lord. In our quiet moments, when we can sense his presence interiorly. In our confused moments, when we experience his caring guidance over the decisions we need to make. In our grateful moments, when we realise how abundantly we are blessed. Mary's faithfulness brought her, as it does us, deep joy. Jesus is not dead, as she had supposed, but fully alive, calling her by name. To the world you may be just one person, but to one person you are the world.

Very Rev Gabriel Everitt, OSB  
*Prior Administrator of Ampleforth Abbey*

