

Homily at St. Patrick's Cathedral for Fr. Rom Murphy's Pontifical Requiem, 14th May, 2014 by Fr. Len Thomas.

Why? Why, Fr Rom? Priests keep asking me 'Why have your Requiem here at St. Patrick's Cathedral?' You were never appointed here. It's not your regular territory. You were a free spirit. Vicar-General Greg Bennett suggested 'you could have been a writer for Lonely Planet given your many exotic places of interest and experiences. You 'Seemed to live in a different time zone'. 'Your friends were never quite sure when you would pop in.' Or, as priests who gathered at Braybrook one evening found out, WHETHER you would even BE there on time when you invited THEM in for a meal.

After ordination, you served as ASSISTANT priest in suburban parishes north, south and east, : Preston 1958, St. Kilda East 1962, Moonee Ponds '66, Frankston '67, Kilmore '68, Noble park 1970 . Then as PARISH Priest in the Western Suburbs: Kensington 1971, and Braybrook 1980; back to the East, Bennettswood 1992 and you squeezed in Macleod 1978. There are many stories about your ministry in all these places, the unironed shorts, the friendliness.

But it was in In Hong Kong's four refugee camps you thrived. You learnt Vietnamese in 1991 and 1992, and followed through with Vietnamese Masses back home here, doing weddings even into recent years. You tell the story often that on Hong Kong buses, you asked Fr. Cyril Blake why people stood up to give YOU their seat, & not so for Cyril . Cyril replied: "You look so old Rom, that you remind them of their ancestors."

You enjoyed being with the young, the poor, asylum seekers, and refugees. A kind priest, a free-speaker, willing to support people in practical ways. You led your priestly life as Pope Francis wants us to do, being open,

being missionary, listening to others, not judgmental. You and I took the tram outside George Maher House on many weekends, to St. Kilda beach, for a coffee and then return. You loved just observing the many nationalities and different age groups, and caused going by. The Jesuit Refugee Service, the Columbans, Melbourne Overseas Mission, and the Geraldton diocese among others, accepted your services. You had a fund of stories to bring liturgies alive whatever the local language or customs.

Fr. Bren Donohue spent a lot of early years at the Murphys' home in East Malvern. Bren notes that Rom and his mates had no trouble discussing the sermon after Mass, serving Benediction, going to school, playing tennis, moving in and out of the Murphy household, a happy place, welcoming, encouraging, playful. There was a desire to make the world a better place. There was empathy for migrants, for victims. If there were any rivalries they were played out on the tennis court. The Murphys were beautiful people in every sense of the word, says Bren.

Rom's sister Mary and nephew Peter captured that spirit in the pre-Mass eulogy. Rom took into his priesthood for 56 years, what began in his youth, in his family, in East Malvern parish and De La Salle College. He had humility. He stalled when about to be ordained in 1957 and postponed for several months, until Archbishop Simonds said: "Rom, you will be alright." He often told the story that he had learned that God's grace was more generous than his own limitations."

Rom and six others from St. Mary's East Malvern parish were in the diocesan seminary at one time. About 20 from De La Salle Malvern were in Corpus Christi together. An acquaintance of the Murphys said, If you get hospitality right you get all the other virtues right. The Murphy household was close to the heart of the Gospel and Christianity. So was Rom.

But as Rom has found with his recent sicknesses, life and the following of Jesus is not always easy. His golfing days and his car-driving days faded away, or crashed away. The bean-counters had trouble documenting Rom's escapades and life-style. Melbourne Cricket Club has dress rules. Outside the Members' door we usually had to help him put on his tie and jacket. One day he was stopped at the entrance because he wore sandals. Simply, he looked down and said that his feet needed to breathe. Could he see the supervisor? The same hang-dog look, no anger or frustration. Just the humble request. Next thing he and I were escorted to special front sets, for the disabled.

Often when he would travel to the Members, the ball was bounced. And Rom was found slumped, relaxed, deep in sleep.

Rom read well the latest theologies and 'lives'. He wanted information. He by-passed structures and institutions when possible. He knocked on the door of a theologate in the United States, to do the course. Starting next day. 'But you're not booked in,' they said. 'No, but I want to come for the few weeks.' 'But we haven't got your application, your references, your health and psych checks (as people must have, to do their Sabbaticals).' 'I can pay' I've come all this way. I want to stay.' The secretary said: 'As a matter of fact we've just had a cancellation...' So... Rom did the course.

Of retirement in 2004 he found it very hard: "Full-on one day and nothing the next," he said. But he had a short period as Administrator of Hampton East parish, supplied in various parishes and in Port Headland, Western Australia, before living at George Maher House, Justin Villa and finally John Hannah home

The Christian Gospel if well played out can be very disturbing, both to ourselves, but also to others.

Bishop Joe O'Connell, who entered the seminary at the same time as Rom, and became a life-long friend, said mischievously: 'that he would like to travel overseas a day behind Rom just to observe the chaos caused. The sort of chaos that Jesus and the church through 2,000 years have experienced, and caused, and still experience and causes today.'

So why have your funeral here at St. Patrick's Cathedral? we ask. The last word belongs to you Rom.

I was ordained a priest here at St. Patrick's Cathedral, so I want to be buried from St. Patrick's Cathedral.

L.T.