

HOMILY FOR THE GOLDEN JUBILEE OF MGR. HARRY TURNER

OUR LADY OF LOURDES HARPENDEN

5 JUNE 2016

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I have known Mgr Harry Turner for over sixty years; we came from the same parish; we were inspired by the same priests; we went to the same rough North London boys Grammar School; we were students at the same seminary, although six years apart. His was the first ordination I witnessed fifty years ago today. Not only was Harry older than me, but also much cleverer. He probably doesn't remember having to study 14th century 'Canterbury Tales' for his 'O' level GCE in English Literature. In the Prologue, Geoffrey Chaucer writes of the Parson and says:

There was a good man of religion, too.

A country parson, poor, I warrant you;

But rich he was in holy thought and work.

He was a learned man also, a clerk,

Who Christ's own gospel truly sought to preach.

I think we would be hard pressed to find a better description of the life and ministry of 50 years of priesthood than to say "*rich he was in holy thought and work*", not only teaching lessons for life and love, and service and dedication, but learning them himself. "*Who Christ's own gospel truly sought to preach*".

The reading we heard from the Letter to the Hebrews puts the vision of priesthood in another way:

“Every high priest has been taken out of mankind and is appointed to act for men in their relations with God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins; and so he can sympathise with those who are ignorant or uncertain because he too lives in the limitations of weakness.” (Heb 5:1-2)

Isn't that what Harry has done in these last fifty years? Using the grace and personal gifts God has given him not for his own purposes for the glory of God and the service of God's people. Isn't that what all priests are directed, ordered, ordained to do?

To make it possible for the People of God, you and I, to worship God not in each person's own limited way, nor even as a community project. The essence of the Mass we offer is that it is not we who offer it. It is Jesus Christ himself who offers the perfect worship of God by giving the total loving sacrifice of himself to God and to God's people. It is the priest who re-presents, represents, that saving action. It is the priest who remembers, re-members, puts back the broke fragments of the Body of Christ in this time and in this place and in these people. No accident that the Church is called 'The Body of Christ'. As hundreds of individuals we each have our own identity and dignity, our strengths and our weaknesses. In communion with each other we have a greater dignity – to be Christ's presence in this parish, in this place, in this home, in this school, in this workplace. Of course we receive Jesus in Holy Communion each time we come to mass. But in that sacred action we are received by him into communion with God and with each other also. 'The Body of Christ? Amen. I believe'.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church explains it this way:

“Whilst the priesthood of the faithful is exercised by the unfolding of baptismal grace – a life of faith, hope and charity, a life according to the Spirit- the ministerial priesthood is at the service of the common priesthood. The ministerial priesthood is a means by which Christ unceasingly builds up and leads his Church. For this reason, it is transmitted by its own sacrament, the sacrament of Holy orders. The ordained priesthood empowers the people to become what they are called to be – “...a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people set apart” (1 Peter 2:9)

Highbury, Edgware, London Colney, Bushey, Hammersmith, Central London, Harpenden and many major responsibilities in between. These are the geographical signposts of Harry Turner's journey in his service as a priest priest, inspiring and serving countless thousands of people on their inner journey of faith towards union with God.

Two weeks ago, Pope Francis spoke to the Bishops of Italy and meditated on the best qualities of the priest:

“With the oil of hope and consolation, he makes himself neighbour to everyone, careful to share with them abandonment and suffering He knows that Love is everything. He does not seek assurances or honorific titles which lead to trust in men His simple and essential lifestyle, always available, makes him credible in the eyes of the people and brings him close to the humble, in a pastoral charity that makes him free He is a man of peace and reconciliation, a sign and instrument of God's tenderness, careful to spread goodness with the same passion with which others look after their own interests”.

Need I say more? All of us have seen and experienced those qualities in Harry Turner over the years and have good reason to give thanks to God for them today. Thank you, Harry, for all you have done and for all you have been throughout your life and in your priesthood. I have said more, but I must let the absolutely final word go to Geoffrey Chaucer again:

Nor haughty in his speech, nor too divine,

But in all teaching prudent and benign.

To lead folk into heaven, but by stress

Of good example, was his busyness!