

REQUIEM MASS FOR MOTHER VERONICA PYE

POOR CLARES MONASTERY MUCH BIRCH

19 JANUARY 2015

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One of the most moving moments in the ceremony of religious profession must surely be when the sister prostrates herself in front of the altar and everybody joins in the singing of the Litany of the Saints on her behalf. That prostration is a gesture of attentiveness to the word of God. *"Speak, Lord, your servant is listening"*. It is a gesture of abandonment and trust. *"Here I am, Lord, I come to do your will"*. It is a gesture of humility. *"Lord, I am not worthy...but only say the word"*. The community sings, *"Saints of God, come to her aid."* These and many other thoughts must have been in the heart and mind of Sister Veronica when she first joined the Poor Clares in Bullingham 1946 and then at her Final Profession as well as during her life of dedication over these last sixty-seven years. The family of the Church and the daughters of St. Clare have good reason to be grateful to Sister Veronica's own family for the gift she has been to us all. It is good to have them with us as we commend her to the Lord.

Today, Sister Veronica lies in front of the altar in the final act of abandonment, which is death. She lies here at Much Birch, the monastery she did so much to make possible in the courageous move from Bullingham, in the purchase of the land and the new buildings, and equally important in carrying on the rhythm of life and the practice of contemplative prayer, which lies at the heart of the vocation of the Poor Clare. *"Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit"*.

So we come together during this Requiem Mass to give thanks for her life, for her faithful witness and her dedication to the life of prayer and community.

During the Requiem Mass we pray that she will be given a merciful judgment, so that *“carried in the arms of the Good Shepherd she may see God face to face”*. And we pray for those who mourn, those whose lives will be poorer because of the loss of someone they loved. Her own family and the family of the sisters of St. Clare and the wider family of the Church represented by so many people her with us.

There is a Irish author called Peg Sayers who writes of life on the wild Blasket Islands off the west coast of County Kerry in Ireland. This extract from *“An Old Woman Remembers”* speaks not just of the daily struggle for survival in that place, but the contemplative nature of her life when she becomes one with her surroundings, one with herself, one with God. She says:

“It is a simple life we lived here, but nobody could say it was comfortable. Often during life I have known God’s holy help because I was often in the grip of a sorrow from which I could not escape. When the need was greatest, God would lay his merciful eye on me, and the clouds of sorrow would be gone without a trace. In their place would be a spiritual joy whose sweetness I cannot describe here. There are people who think this island is a lonely place, but the peace of God is here. We helped each other. But now my life is spent like a candle, and my hope is rising every day that I’ll be called into the eternal kingdom. May God guide me on this long road I have not travelled before. I think that everything is folly except for loving God”.

The contemplative life as lived on the Blasket Islands teaches the same lesson as the contemplative life lived at the oasis of prayer, which is Much Birch. At the end of her life of faithful contemplative prayer Sister Veronica would surely agree: *“I think that everything is folly except for loving God”*. Amen.