

A PARISH FAREWELL TO CANON BRIAN McEVOY

(said after the 9 am and 10.30 am Masses on Sunday 2 September 2012)

As we all know today is a very special day indeed, for Canon Brian McEvoy, has just celebrated his last Mass as our Parish Priest after over 20 years service. Of course your Pastoral Council could not let this occasion pass without having the chance to say thank you to Brian for his years and years of dedicated service to us all.

To be truthful I feel a bit of a fraud standing up here on your behalf, for I am well aware that as a relative newcomer to the Parish there are many of you in the congregation who not only know Brian so much better than I do, but who also have so many more reasons to thank him for his love and care. However, I'll do my best.

To start with I tried to see if I could make a list of all the qualities that I thought were necessary in a good Parish Priest – spirituality, love, concern for others, approachableness, sense of humour – the list goes on – so I gave that up for I found that I was, in effect, making a list to myself of all of Brian's qualities.

Of spirituality Saint Thomas Aquinas said:

Better to illuminate than merely to shine, to deliver to others contemplated truths than merely to contemplate

and doesn't that so simply and effectively sum up Brian's great gift as a great spiritual communicator. I am sure that there are many of you who, like me, have in the past, sat through detailed sermons which have washed over the tops of our heads, and yet Brian's short, to the point sermons I know are always directed straight at me and are simply un-missable! What a gift.

And his love and concern for us all, his parishioners and for the wider community here in Bath, is simply legendary. In his rule, Saint Benedict of Nursia states:

He should first show them in deeds rather than words all that is good and holy.

Brian has always 'led from the front', a characteristic that I really appreciate. Not for him some deeply mystic Christianity, but one that that is about us, the people of God in his care, and also about the people of God who are not within his immediate care too. Brian's ministry has been one of love, love for each other, love in our families, in our communities, love between races, between classes, between religions, between peoples. And what a wonderful example he has shown us throughout his time as our leader.

We are so lucky here in Saint Mary's. Saint John Vianney said:

The priesthood is the love of the heart of Jesus. When you see a priest, think of our Lord Jesus Christ

And that is the simple, straightforward example that Brian has given us – and you know we are all better people for it.

Of course in recent years Brian's life has had more than its fair share of suffering, and I know we have over the past few years all been praying very hard for Brian to be spared some of that suffering. Saint Augustine said:

God had one son on earth without sin, but never one without suffering

In other words suffering is our lot here on earth, and Brian has borne his suffering with his eternal cheerful optimism and good humour. The things he has been through would have broken a lesser man, but holding onto his faith and with the support of our prayers he has come through.

It is so fitting that as Brian moves out of the Rectory into retirement that he won't be moving far – just down to the Almshouse of Saint John the Baptist. How grateful we are as a Parish for the generous way this (now) Anglican foundation has so willingly and generously accepted you, and indeed have positively encouraged you to say Mass once more in the chapel of Saint James. God indeed moves in mysterious ways.

Brian, we all owe you more that we can express or more than you will ever know. You have touched the lives of literally thousands of people, but most especially the people of this Parish to whom you have been a Pastor, confessor, confidant, leader, conscience – and above all a friend. You must know that we all love you, we will miss you and we are desperately sad to see you retire. We are heartened in the knowledge that retirement will allow you to relax a bit and to concentrate on yourself. Long overdue.

There will be a short reception in the parish centre for Brian after the 1030 Mass, but for now, although somehow it seems to me to be a little weak, can I ask that we all stand and thank Brian for his long dedicated service in the traditional way.

Bob Hussey