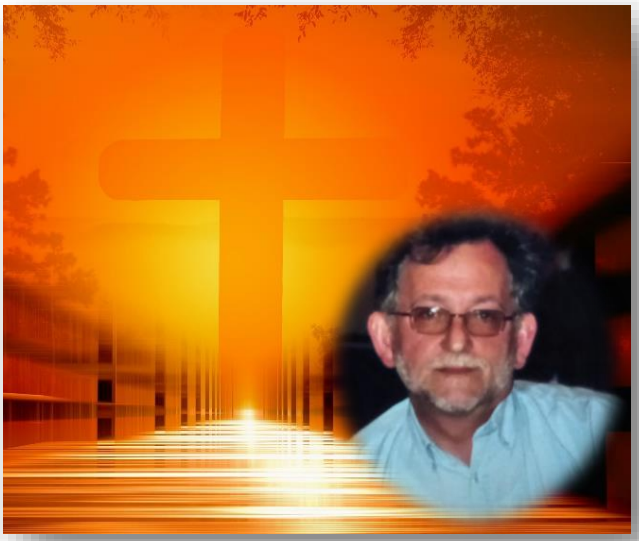
“ALL FOR JESUS, THROUGH MARY, WITH A SMILE”

Homily on the life of Fr Raymond O’Connell O.S.M

By Fr. Colm McGlynn O.S.M



Once upon a time, a young man of 18 years entered a very silent monastery in Benburb County Tyrone Northern Ireland. The Prior Dermot advised him to come to his office, and give a two word report after his first year in Benburb. A year later the student turned up in Dermot s office with his two words……*”BED HARD!”* In his second year the students two words to prior Dermot were .....*”FOOD COLD!”* In his third year, the students two words to Prior Dermot were .....*I’M LEAVING!* And Prior Dermot said: *“that's fine, you've done nothing but complain since you entered”.*

Alas this morning, we confirm this student friar Raymond O’Connell, who entered Servite religious life at the tender age of 18, left our world aged 73, last Sunday night 18th August, in Youghal and District Nursing Home County Cork Ireland, Well, 73 years on into a life that meandered in many varied directions, we honour the reality of the various seasons of his life, and his return to his native Cork, in the season of Covid 19, so challenging for us all. Listening to our first reading from the book of Ecclesiastes, all of you here and those tuning in on livestream webcam can identify your own season of relationship with Raymond or Ray O’Connell - Paul Addison, our Servite Province of the Isles Secretary named these seasons in an obituary in recent days, now on Benburb Facebook page.

- Seasons in Youghal Cork to 18 with his Mam, Dad, Ellen and William O’Connell and family.
- Seasons of entering into Servite life, at a tender young age of 18, and seasons of Servite Solemn Profession and ordination after seasons of study in University College Dublin, and Holy Ghost Fathers in Kimmage Manor Dublin.
- And then further seasons of study in the Irish Management Institute Sandyford Dublin and Irish school of Ecumenics, Trinity College Dublin, and Tavistock institute London.
- Seasons of involvement with Servite friar Dermot McNiece in earliest beginnings of St Peregrine cancer ministry in early 1980s, in Elm Park House Rathfarnham, with famous Furey Brothers concert, in the national stadium in Dublin.
- Seasons of living in our Servite Parish of St Mary of the Servants Blakestown, and contribution to the building of Blakestown Resource Centre, and 9 years as Blakestown Community School Chaplain, and appreciated so much by Victor Black Principal, and staff and pupils.
- Seasons of involvement as Treasurer, Bursar in Milltown Park Institute Dublin, helping students like Ruth who now works with Jimmy Kelly in Cloverhill Prison Clondalkin in Dublin.

- Seasons of the Servite Shop, Camden St Dublin, and Servite Oratory Ministry Rathfarnham and Cornelscourt Dublin.
- Seasons of setting up new Servite community in Kiltiiper road in Tallaght, and move to Clonburris community in Clondalkin Dublin.
- And finally, the place dearest to his heart, pastorally and administratively, the Servite Priory, Benburb, Co Tyrone, Northern Ireland, and his very long years of involvement there in hospitality to so many groups. Ray loved The Friends of Benburb, in the lavish generosity of their 50 years of fundraising effort to keep Benburb afloat. We can bask today in the memories of great fun and joy and friendship, and of the thousands that turned up for Benburb Sunday's, quiz nights, fashion shows, cultural and historical enactments, up to the moment when Covid 19 drew it all to a close.

And then heroically and miraculously, the birth of a new season of the order of Mary Servite Trust, which cemented the progress made by Fr Ray and all involved in Servite Priory Benburb, celebrated, and remembered at the recent wonderful 75th Anniversary of Servite presence. Ray was blessed with very loyal staff of very long years: Maud Quinn, Theresa Dobbin Donaghy, Noilin Mullin, and so many more. All the staff and part-time staff for various events felt Ray was good to them, and so kind to the needy, who called at Benburb's doors, and the way he reached out compassionately in confession to people attending monthly St Peregrine Masses.

We acknowledge today too, the last seasons of his life in stroke, heart, and cancer suffering years, and great care in Ashbrook Care Home, Clonoe County Tyrone, and finally Youghal and District Nursing Home, in Cork. Yes indeed, as St. Paul shares in his 2nd reading to the Romans, the life and death of each one of us has its influence on others; even his influence on Benburb dogs and fish tanks, and shipbuilding hobbies, and care of Benburb libraries and archives, and contribution to renewal of library project building, with Chairperson, Professor Gerry McKenna and Fr Chris O'Brien Sr Meabh Ni Uallachain St. Louis, Noreen Taggart, and other members of library committee. Ray as we know too, could when necessary, be as straight as a poker if his toes got walked on. Our Gospel of St. John today, offers a reassuring word to all of us - there are many rooms in my Father's house, and instead of Ray's room of 20 plus years, on the top floor in benburb, now in a new room, with his Dad and Mam, William, and Ellen, and all the O'Connell loved ones, and Servite brothers and sisters he walked the road of life with. Fr Bernard Thorne, Fr Sean Lennon, Fr Eamon McCreave, the last Servites he lived with in Benburb. I ask myself ...will he now be watching Dr Who or Star Trek in his love of all things outer space? Will he be having his black coffee, and morning newspaper read, and much loved plate of chips at mealtimes? Or smarties, or wee drop of scotch at days end nightcap or Sunday lunch, can of Guinness?

In all of Rays attempts to understand his place in our Cosmos with his scientifically enquiring mind, Ray once shared a homily in our student years small chapel which I never forgot, challenging us with these words: *"I don't believe in God, but I believe God believes in me*"; this compassionate God experience was the real Ray deep down if on the surface at times he pretended otherwise. A kind, sensitive soul, a brother to so many, as reflected on comments of recent days, from folk up North and South, and further afield. We know as his Servite brothers in the TV room, if he got control of programs it was curtains, for match of the day, or GAA matches out the window, with his giant screen films, and so techno savvy in the world of wonder he lived in. Ray died suddenly last Sunday night in a place he was so well cared for in Youghal and District Nursing Home. We thank Angela Liston manager, and all the staff for their care of Ray. They daily lived the words in today's Gospel *"Come to me all who are sad, broken-hearted and weary, and I will give you rest"*. I started this reflection in a monastery, and I conclude it with the words of a man well versed, with the silence of his Benedictine monastery, Fr Lawrence Freeman *"maranatha: come lord Jesus come"*. We glorify God by going

through all of the stages and experiences of life, going through them in a way that releases the full energy and potential of the experience. We don't get stuck. We don't deny but are obedient to the flow of things - so just go with the flow. That's the glory of God in us, and we can glorify each other, in this way, by helping each other to go through the stages of our journey which is why Community is so important. We thank God for Rays Servite life of building community until he went into the flow of Eternal Life last Sunday night, perhaps in Star Trek hero Scotties words to Dr Spock: *"Beam me up Jesus"* and perhaps muttering too his oft quoted mantra: ALL FOR JESUS, THROUGH MARY, WITH A SMILE.

Shared by Servite brother Fr. Colm Mc Glynn, Holy Family Church, Youghal County Cork Wednesday 21st August 2024, 12 O'clock Mass with Servite brothers, Tim Flynn, Pat Gethins, Pat Ryall, and Chris O'Brien, and Servite family members, representing Marley, Blakestown and Benburb.