

Funeral Homily for Fr Tom Jordan, 19th August 2020

First Reading: Song of Songs 3:1-4

Second Reading: Ephesians 4:1-7 & 11-13

Gospel: John 20: 1-2, 11-18

The Gospel that Fr Brett has just read is one of the most profound encounters in the whole of the Bible, and speaks beautifully into Fr Tom's life. We are by the tomb of the Risen Lord; for his whole life as a priest, Tom has been pointing people towards the glorious Resurrection love of Jesus Christ, and it is the heart and centre of today, for as the prayers of this very Mass tell us, "death is life changed but not ended."

In this scene of Resurrection glory is the vital figure of Mary Magdalene. For Tom, Ordained on the Feast of St Mary Magdalene, this Gospel and each of today's readings are wonderful dishes carefully prepared with Divine ingredients; read at his Ordination, and Silver Jubilee of Priesthood, these Bible passages are like the finest food, they have flavours which burst on the tongue in ways that Tom has savoured, and discovered afresh, over his entire life. So today, dear friends, let's sample this smorgasbord of scripture, with Tom for our guide.

A meal with Tom would, naturally, begin with an aperitif, and we have one here today, a quote that is not from Scripture but from St Irenaeus: "The Glory of God is man fully alive." You can see it on the front of today's Order of Service, the image from the prayer card at Fr Tom's Ordination, in 1989, and when he celebrated 25 years of priesthood here in 2014. He had other quotes, too – "never trust a slim chef." And "never visit a country without trying out at least one hospital." Ah no – that wasn't a quote, it was just what he did. Car crash, skiing accident, tapeworm, falling down the stairs on the way to the airport. When the Icelandic ash cloud grounded flights was Tom safely at home? He was not. He was in County Mayo, and had to be driven to the nearest ferry. His extensive travel was partly due to his time as the representative of the Bishops on the European Conference of Priests – and partly due to an absolute love of travel that saw him fly to India as recently as six months ago.

"The Glory of God is man fully alive"- In John's Gospel Jesus says, "I have come so that you may have life and have it to the full." Tom came alive in the kitchen, albeit with catastrophic consequences for whoever was washing up. When he was training to be a chef his mother said, "That boy takes 24 saucepans to boil peas" – and he definitely did, but Tom's food was truly exquisite, and a wonderful

treat. And yet – even as a first class chef, there was disquiet in Tom. On the day of a funeral it is good for each of us to ask ourselves, what does it mean to be fully alive, to the Glory of God? For Tom, the answer came dramatically on 13th May 1981, the day that Pope John Paul II was shot in St Peter's Square.

In a talk that you can still hear on the Brentwood Vocations website, Tom described coming home from work that evening and then being held, for three hours, in a kind of prayer-like trance, standing looking through the kitchen window; hours in which many reflections about his life surfaced. The Pope had been shot. The world was in a time of upheaval, there was disquiet in politics, and there was disquiet in Tom's heart – was he living as he was truly called to live? He had a great life as a chef, in many ways, but was he fully alive, to the Glory of God?

After those three hours held in Divine contemplation Tom sought out Canon Mick McKenna, a priest he had known when a pupil at All Saints school, then Bishop Ward, and he poured out his heart to him. Mick listened, offered forgiveness in God's name, and spoke with Tom about Priesthood.

And so we are led to the first course amongst our readings which speak so deeply, in Tom's life and perhaps in our own. The first reading is from the Song of Songs, which is a love poem, the lover in search of the Beloved, and the Beloved also in search of the lover. In the segment we heard there is disquiet, a restless seeking as the bride searches the streets; and then she exclaims "I found him who my heart loves." That was Tom's journey – searching for God, searching for the Beloved, and there are echoes of St Augustine, "My heart is restless, O Lord, until it rests in you."

Tom's ministry was defined by forgiveness, encouragement and radically inclusive welcome – along with immense generosity; like Jesus, Tom did most of his pastoral work over a meal. Most certainly he could be stubborn, and as one Facebook tribute drily put it, "his patience was finite." But he knew when he was getting tetchy, and could joke about it; with Tom, you were never far from forgiveness. More than once we spoke about how Pope John Paul II sought out the man who had shot him, visited him in prison, and showed him complete mercy and forgiveness, to the point where that man became a Catholic. To go to Confession with Tom was a privilege of that same grace-filled mercy, offered with gentleness and wisdom. Priests sought him out as Amicus Clero – friend of the clergy – for his pastoral heart, overflowing with kindness.

Tom left school with one O level, in art. But he also left with the memory of a wonderfully encouraging head teacher, who sat the despondent Tom down, on results day, and told him not to give up, that he had a great character, and would do great things. Tom remembered that, and brought that same nurturing encouragement to the young. In that spirit, I would like to take a moment today to speak directly to the children and young people watching and praying. I know that you are sad that Fr Tom has died – he was your high-fiving, joking, kind and generous priest, and you miss him here, and at your school. Mrs Waterfield wrote to me and told me how Fr Tom would liven up your school Masses with bunnies of peace, and wonderful singing.

So I would like to ask each of the children and young people watching and praying on YouTube, how do you think Fr Tom would be encouraging you today? Fr Tom's joy was the joy of Jesus Christ, and the joy of a nurturing heart. I think what Fr Tom would ask each of you is, what are you really good at? What do you love doing? And how can you use that gift, that talent, to serve Jesus. Again, this is a moment to take a bite from scripture, to savour some fresh flavours, because this is exactly what the second reading is all about – finding our gifts, and using them for the glory of God. As some spice, we can add another of Fr Tom's favourite quotes, from a wonderful Saint called Francis de Sales, words he has written in the book of every First Holy Communion child in this parish for the last 17 years: "Be what you are, be it well, and all for the Glory of God." Be what you are – an artist, a baker, a computer genius, someone who is wonderful at maths, drama, music, English or science. Be what you are – a loyal friend, someone who is generous, and shares, and is kind. Fr Tom wants to encourage you – and I want to encourage you – to be what you are for the glory of God. If you are sad today, use your very best gift to create something to encourage someone else – make a card, bake a cake, do some training, practice some music. And as you do it, say a prayer, and know that Jesus is also encouraging you, every step of the way. Dear young people, you mattered greatly to Fr Tom, and you matter to this parish. You are very precious to Jesus.

Forgiveness, encouragement, generosity and welcome. Our main course has complex flavours. When Fr Tom's parents arrived in England there was a lot of hostility. His parents were Irish and there were signs on pub doorways – "No dogs, no blacks, no Irish." Tom remembered that, even 60 years later, and he lived priesthood with radical welcome – most especially to those often on the edges - to migrants and refugees, to the homeless, to the LGBT community, and to those who had left the church. From his hospital bed at Queens, just a few weeks ago, Fr Tom was arranging Baptisms, and sorting out weddings; as nurses and other patients told him their stories of disconnection from the church, he listened with love, and helped them find new pathways.

And so our attention returns to the figure of St Mary Magdalene, a figure cured by Christ, after facing rejection. Jesus saw past any labels to the person, loved by God, and made in the image and likeness of God, and simply because she was a woman he risked scandal by welcoming her as a disciple. Standing by the tomb on Easter morning she is dejected – “they have taken my Lord and I do not know where they have put him.” Jesus does not rebuke her for not recognising him; instead with great tenderness he gently speaks her name. “‘Mary’, he said, and she knew him then.” So Mary Magdalene becomes the first witness to the Resurrection. Wherever we might be dejected, lost, shunned, on the edges, afraid or alone, Jesus gently calls us by name. Mary Magdalene shows us that. Tom shows us that. Jesus leads us, as he leads them, into the pure light and hope that is the glory of the Resurrection.

If I was continuing the metaphor of the meal, I would say that after the main course of that Gospel, a delectable dessert course, no doubt with some dessert wine, comes in the form of Tom’s wonderful sisters. Maria, Theresa and Monica, Tom absolutely delighted in each of you – his holy trinity – and he would always speak of you, as well as his nieces, great nephews and great nieces. That he spent his last days with you around his bed is something which gave him enormous strength, consolation, and peace. And Julia, dear Julia, what you have done for Tom, and for this parish, over so many years, is beyond words. Thank you.

We just have time for one little after dinner drink. Fr Tom’s generosity remained until the very end; even with the rest of his body weak and broken, he found that there was one thing he could give as an organ donor – his corneas. The cornea is a small membrane, at the front of the eye, and it is vital. It refracts light – that means that it takes all of the light around us, and helps us make sense of it, creating an image that we can understand. It is amazing, and it seems to me that in Tom donating his corneas there is a powerful metaphor. Because refracting the light was what Tom did, all his life; taking the enormity of the love, joy, kindness, inclusion, welcome and forgiveness of God, and making sense of it, by living it, in the name of Jesus Christ.

May he Rest in Peace and Rise in Glory. Amen.