

FR CASSIAN'S FUNERAL

Fr Cassian died as he lived.

Quietly and with dignity.

Only moments before I had been discussing with the District Nurse the likely timing of death, and then he took us all by surprise.

But then Cassian was a man of surprises. Quiet, unassuming but full of incredible information, some of which you never thought would interest him. He was, however, a man on a journey. He had worked in the family pharmacy, trained as a Chartered Accountant, had a love of medieval history, and then taught in a variety of schools and colleges. He was even a prospective Liberal candidate for Peterborough.

His journey brought him into the Church and into monastic life, first at Farnborough and then here in 1990. Quiet, unassuming, yes, but he had an amazing interest in people, shown by his time of ministry in our parishes of Kirkbymoorside, Warwick Bridge, Knaresborough, St Austin's Grassendale, Bamber Bridge, Lostock Hall, Parbold, and finally Leyland. What is known only to a few was his love for and loyalty to the Cenacolo community in Kendal where he went nearly every Monday. He was able to offer real support to some of the most vulnerable in society.

The patience and long suffering that St Paul spoke of in the first reading were certainly present in the manner that Fr Cassian accepted the diagnosis of cancer, and this was a marked feature of the way he approached death. Quiet, confident, full of faith. The Gospel expressed it in this way: *'All that the Father gives me will come to me and whoever comes to me I shall not turn him away.'* Here is a quiet, confident faith. Surrounded by the voices of despair, devastation and disaster, this is the faith that reminds us that death is not the end, pain and suffering never have the last word. The vision that Paul gives us and that is founded upon the example and teaching of Jesus himself says Love always wins. Because this love is not a sentiment, a feeling, a passing emotion it is a person who has risked everything to reveal the heart and mind of God, His Father and ours.

The liturgy of Christian burial is equally quiet, confident and full of faith. Our task is not to focus on the person who has died, to give eulogies on their merits and to make them the centre of attention. The liturgy points to the sure and certain hope that those who die in Christ are already assured a place at the banquet of heaven. This confidence arises not from what Cassian did or even failed to do but from the grace given at baptism. A grace that was renewed each time he received the Eucharistic presence of Jesus. Because grace, as the Catechism teaches, is the participation in the life of the Trinity. Eternal life was already a gift placed within him and which he now enjoys.

Our desire is to pray that this gift and promise will come to fruition. It is in the very face of death that the door of eternity swings open. As the Preface at Mass says: *'Life is changed not ended.'* If this were the end, if there was no hope of heaven then we would be amid a tragedy. When Fr Cassian went to Cenacolo my instinct is he wanted to say to those young people whose lives had been damaged with drink or drugs. *'There is more!' 'There is much more'*. He would have wanted to say that every single one of us has within us the seed of hope. We desire a better future, healing peace and serenity. We then discover that this hunger for hope is not a feeling but a person. A person who says I AM WITH YOU. I AM IN YOU. BELIEVE IN ME AND YOU HAVE ETERNAL LIFE.

Our hope is rooted in the one who was born in poverty and who died in humiliation, but who rose from the dead in glory. The greatest sickness in our world is not the cancer of the body, but the emptiness, loneliness and indifferences that murder the soul. I am reminded of words that Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn placed on the lips of one of the characters in his novel *Caner Ward*: *'The meaning of existence was to preserve unspoiled undisturbed and undistorted the image of eternity with which each person is born.'*

The living hope that has been placed within us must become love in action. As we pray for Fr Cassian today, we also pray that being made aware of the seed of life and hope that has been given to us, we may live this mission and witness to the pulsating life of Jesus among us.

Abbot Robert Igo, OSB
Ampleforth Abbey
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