

## VIGIL FOR PETER McGRATH, C.P.

### February 1957

We could enter into this reflection on that day in February 1957, sixty-one years ago, when Peter and I arrived at St. Ives to begin our journey with the Passionists. Peter, straight out of school and seventeen and a half, and me, the same, at sixteen going on seventeen. Some of those who travelled the course with us at that time, were Peter Gaughan, Justin Ives, Brian O'Neill, Tony McGovern, Peter Williams, Mark Wells, and about 15 others!



### Joe, Dot Helen and Anne

Of course, Peter's story before that belonged with Joe and Dot, Helen and Anne. And Anne you were so very faithful and loving to you brother in his last sickness.

As I remember, Peter was a quite pious lad from Blacktown, very intent on living out his calling to the Passionists.

### The Present

But let's leap from that day until the present moment, which is no less real, and even more tangible and actual, as are the reality of our relationships even though Peter has left us. That same lad from Blacktown is now completely at peace, no more tears, no more striving, but enjoying the fulfilment of everything we all yearn for here on this earth.

Though over the last couple of years, through Peter's sickness, we were preparing for the inevitable day when the Lord would call him, my experience was that everything changed with the knowledge that Peter had actually gone to God and had fought the good fight. This is our faith, and it is as real to us our gathering here, with Peter, is real. This reality somehow changed my memories of my journey of 61 years with Peter. Peter is now, fully, the person whom our creative God meant him to be. We **rejoice** with him.

## Looking back to the Past

We can **give thanks** for every gift that Peter used to serve others: from his gregariousness, his ability to communicate, his insights and sharp intellect, and his great compassion.

## A creation of God

The image of the potter and the clay come to my mind. And “Christ’s work of art” Paul talks about in Ephesians.

And we can think, very obviously, of the great achievement of the Passionist Family Groups. We all know the story of those small beginnings at Terrey Hills and the wonderful way that the genius of Peter’s ideas enriched so many thousands of lives over the years. And we think of all the people who also took part in that journey, from the very beginning. That spark that caught alight in 1984, brought about a great fire of love in so many lives.

There are also the **unknown** ways that Peter touched others’ lives in so many small ways, and perhaps which will remain unknown to us, until we too are in the Father’s house. Those otherwise unknown, but precious lives.

These are all parts of the creative material that the Potter used. And there was also, as there is with all of us, the ‘**shadow side**’ of ourselves. We could not be faithful to Pete, not to recognise that the journey for Peter at times, was so difficult in many ways, and some would know more of that inner journey than I do. But this too is how God shaped Peter. That is why everything is changed now: no more tears, no more longing, no more searching, no more yearning - the shroud has been lifted from Peter, as Isaiah declares.

We are all works of art in Christ. (Eph.2, 10)

We Passionists remember the energy he brought as Provincial and how Peter is embedded in our own story.

**So, I bring all the great memories** of laughter and enjoyment and the sharing of lives and of faith. And also, the struggles - and those, for a sedate Adelaide lad like myself, occasions of squirming when out with Peter for a meal, and his communicating with the Manager, the Maitre D’, the sous chef, the cleaner and most of the other patrons at the restaurant.

Or the Christmas times with Dot, Anne and Vince, Louise, Peter and Dan, when Dot would give her own “Queen’s message” for that year. Great memories.

Peter had a special connection with my own family and there were many memories of years gone by when there was plenty of laughter and family enjoyment. Mum was always quite taken with this 'larrikin' from Sydney!

### **Strong and faithful friendships: sign of Grace**

But, at the end of the journey, what stands out most to me - even though over a few decades our paths didn't cross that much - is the legacy of faithful friendship that Peter leaves behind.

The people involved, like **Barbara Lunnon and Mary Ingham**, and hundreds of other Family Group Leaders, **those friendships that began from the very beginnings of the story of Peter and St. Anthony in the Fields and remain** strong to this day. To leave that legacy of firm, strong and loving friendships is indeed a 'sign' of the work of Jesus' Spirit in Peter's life.

I remember when my father died and we were all gathered around Dad's bed, our eldest sister, Marie, asked Dad to forgive us if we had ever hurt him, and for him to be assured that if there were any regrets he had as a father, that they no longer exist. At this moment, forgiveness, which is at the very heart of the life of God, reigns supreme, in our relationships with Peter.

Peter you have certainly fought the good fight, and we not only give thanks, even with our tears, but **rejoice** with you now that you have that peace of heart that you yearned for.

Won't it be extraordinary and wonderful to share that with you one day?

Fr Tony Egar CP