

Homily for Fr Peter McGrath Kevin Dance

As he began his homily, Kevin explained that much of this homily came from a letter he had written to Peter on the occasion of Peter's 50th Anniversary of Ordination. Peter had not been at the Province Assembly when all our anniversaries that year were celebrated.

Back in June 2014 I wrote to Peter from Papua New Guinea: *I was sorry not to have caught up with you in Melbourne at the Assembly when the various Jubilees were celebrated. You were spoken of fondly in your absence. But I suspected that your absence was the fruit of your feeling alienated and unappreciated by some of the men.*

So, I decided to send you this note to salute you as you mark 50 years. You and your priesthood have been a quite extraordinary gift to so many people.

The scripture chosen for this moment of farewell and giving thanks says a lot about your colourful, complex but, finally, very simple life Peter.

Paul writes to his young supporter Timothy: **"I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race"** Earlier in this same letter Paul encouraged Timothy to "endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus ... It reminds me of one of your constant words of encouragement. It was simply: "Press on!"

From John we hear: **"Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another"**. Peter you became a master, helping people, struggling to find the love of God for them. But you found it harder to let that same healing word reach you and take root in the depth of your soul.

Jesus reassured his friends, caught in a whirlwind of emotions, as he prepares to say farewell: **"Trust in God still and trust in me. there are many rooms In my Father's house"**. You were constantly finding room for just a few more - to the frustration of those around you who had to do the hard work, out of your whirlwind, of getting things organized, of keeping the show on the road.

What a journey we have shared. As we struggled with our studies and some not so helpful Directors in Adelaide, who could have imagined the big, complex and thoroughly exciting world that awaited us? A world in turmoil, in the midst of deep change and a church in ferment were what you cut your teeth on. These past fifty years have brought more than their fair share of joys, of pain and suffering, of excitement and new ventures. We have been graced to make the journey of our Passionist priesthood through a landscape of quite extraordinary experiences and adventure.

I remember and thank God for your dear parents: I think of the dapper gentleman that was Joe. He bowed courteously and ushered the world on its way with a flourish, a joke, and a smiling word of encouragement. I remember Dorothy. When God made her he broke the mould! So timid in the world beyond her home: yet so much in charge —full of hospitality, humour and love - on her own turf. Her insatiable appetite for learning, information and wisdom made any visit to the McGrath household an exciting time. Your family – your parents, your sister Helen - God's special gift - and Anne, your loving and faithful younger sister – have always been so important to you.

From the "getgo", to quote our American cousins, you were fast out of the blocks - initiator, leader, who showed a magnetic power to gather the folks.

Peter, it was in huge measure the freshness of your approach, your dynamism and your ability to make people feel welcome in the dour atmosphere of the parish church of Corpus Christi that, from those tiny beginning, blossomed the community of St. Anthony in the Fields and the ~~Passionist~~ Family Groups that spread round the world. The genius of the Family Group motto - with the Cross folded down into the heart that is filled with people of every colour and shape to me captures a little of the passion with which you tried to run your race of making real the love of Christ that can bring them to life.

I remember our first attempts at adult education in the wildly exciting days following the Council. They were exhilarating. We flew blind, but the Spirit was on board! You and we built community. You were the catalytic core of what emerged. And the people came. And then they came back!

Those fifty revolutions have seen much growth, much joy and also much pain. Your very gifts Shot enabled you to motivate, to inspire and to enliven, could also agitate and disturb.

You've known considerable suffering during this journey too. As you faced your demons, I salute your painful journey to sobriety. But I think the deepest pain has been the withholding by some of your brothers of their approval or, even more hurtful, of their brotherhood. Because of your need to belong and because you can feel keenly the pain of others, you sometimes crowded people, you tried too hard and made them afraid.

You have known triumph and you have known rejection. But through all the high- points and the low ones, you have grown in an understanding of *the* sea of suffering and the sea of love that is the Passion of Jesus. And over-riding everything else it your compassion. Your sensitive Irish nature, with the black cur of self-doubt stalking you and nipping at your heels, has sometimes made it hard for you to relax and be in your life.

So I salute you for your years of loving service – preacher, parish priest, Provincial, Founder of a movement and man of quite extraordinary generosity. After some quite rough seas that you have weathered, I pray that you can look at this journey with deep thankfulness and gratitude for connections made, for friends gathered, for desperate souls eased, for the vision shared.

Meister Eckhardt reassures us with these words: "if the only prayer you ever managed to pray in your *lifetime* was **Thank You**, that would be enough." The last time I saw you I remember saying "**You've nothing to be afraid of Pete. When you see the Lord he will say 'Well done'**". Your response was a bit of a summary of your life for me. You looked at me and you asked "**Are you serious?**" Then, after quite a pause you asked again: Are you **really** serious?

Well done Peter, earthen vessel, but, most assuredly, vessel of God's compassion and love! So press on, my brother and friend, into the welcoming of our God.