

When I arrived at St Dominic's in early 1976 to enter the novitiate, Fr Brian Reynolds was the Assistant Parish Priest: a position which, oddly enough, I hold today. Over the years of my novitiate and studentate, he was always an encouraging example to me of a diligent and pastoral priest. Brian was deeply and genuinely interested in people. He was never a gossip – in fact, the first thing one noticed about him was his silence – but he was interested in people, and always wanted to know more about them so that he could be a more effective pastor.

A hallmark of his ministry was visitation of families in their homes – and especially of the poorer and disadvantaged families. The relative prosperity of this part of Melbourne could hide the fact that there were families living here who, for one reason or another, were experiencing hardship. Brian always sought to support them: sometimes materially, but also, and perhaps more importantly, spiritually and psychologically, by the way he visited them, paid attention to them, treated them with respect and kindness, made them feel ... somebody.

I accompanied him on a few of these pastoral visits. The best description of him was to say that he was a tremendous listener, and an integral part of that listening was his pipe. As he fiddled with it, tamping and re-tamping the tobacco, lighting and re-lighting it – sometimes successfully, sometimes not, the most agitated interlocutor calmed down. Was Brian silent because he didn't know what to say? Was it that he knew what to say, but was too shy to say it? Or was it that he wanted to give the other person the time to fully express him or herself, and time too to reflect? At any rate, the pipe proved to be an important pastoral aide to Brian. I am not recommending that our students take up smoking: not at all. It was a different age. But his listening, that was what won him the hearts of many of the parishioners in those days.

In short, Brian was an informal mentor to me, and I am tremendously grateful to him for all that I learned from him about being, quite simply, a good priest.

For a man who spoke so little, he had an extraordinary interest in language – or rather, in languages. Someone told me once that he was proficient in Irish. Not knowing a word of Irish myself, I cannot confirm that. But I know he also loved Latin. He read from his favourite book – St Thomas' *Summa*, or actually, a summary of the *Summa* that he bought in Rome in his student days – every day, right up until his death. He was primarily a pastor, yes, but a pastor who

loved his theology, and especially the theology of the angelic doctor. In a sense, he was an epitome of Ireland and the Irish: a land of great poverty and a simple faith, but also the land that has produced, over the centuries, an enormous quantity of high literature, in Irish and Latin and later in English.

As well as reading St Thomas in Latin, Brian would occasionally drop a quote from the classics which betrayed a wider knowledge of Latin literature as well. I share with you a few lines from a poem he surely knew – indeed, he probably studied it at school, as I did. The poet Catullus is returning to his home on Lake Garda, in the north of Italy, after a tiring stint as a minor imperial official in Turkey. We may pray and imagine that Brian has similar sentiments as he returns not to his earthly but his heavenly home, for, as Paul told the Philippians, “for us, our homeland is in heaven.”

O quid solutis est beatius curis,
cum mens onus reponit
ac peregrine labore fessi venimus larem ad nostrum
desideratoque acquiescimus lecto?
Hoc est quod unumst pro laboribus tantis.

Oh what is more beautiful than to be released from one's cares,
when the mind puts aside its burden
and wearied by the hardships of travel we come to our own home,
and find rest in the bed we have longed for?
This alone is worth such great labours.

*Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord,
and let perpetual light shine upon him.
May he rest in peace. Amen.*

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