

Fr Edward Joseph (Ted) Harte

Requiem Mass Homily

by Fr Andrew Fewings

The readings aptly selected for this funeral Mass in celebration of the life and death of Fr Ted speak of the rewards and consolation of the faithful Christian.

The Prophet Isaiah has images of a great banquet and a Mountain of peace. St Paul has images of a good fight, of finishing the race and receiving a crown.

Fr Ted had many foretastes of the promises of God: fine wine among friends - the happy hours in the parish on Fridays and many social occasion, and at the races' finishing line - he was noted in getting very good collects from the tote and recently he received the medal of Order of Australia. Of course more than the material blessings, Fr Ted received and gave many spiritual blessings.

I was first involved with Ted at the annual racing Masses on course at the Bendigo Jockey Club in the early 80's. Ted took all his extra parochial appointments seriously and joyfully: BJC, Marong Racing Club. He would faithfully visit all patients at the Bendigo Hospice on Saturdays, the residents at the Anne Caudle Centre and BUPA Aged Care with regular communion services and Masses and he was the extraordinary Confessor at the Poor Clare Monastery.

The priest's stole placed on his coffin is appropriately the small stole of reconciliation, anointing and communion to the sick.

The Beatitudes, you noticed we used the translation from the New Jerusalem Bible. "Happy would have been adequate, expressing Fr Ted's love of humour, ever-present smile and contentment. Yet the word "Blessed" expresses these and much more.

Blessed are the gentle: Ted strived to be gentle in every circumstance no matter how challenging. I remember 14 years ago he phoned asking what to do. A mother booked in a baptism having chosen for the child's name Sin. His dilemma was he could not refuse the mother's request nor could he baptise a child Sin. I enquired did she book the baptism by mobile phone. He said Yes. I said you rang the right bloke my surname is Fewings, over the phone people often hear S rather than F, I sometimes get Fr Sewings. Ted reported back that, indeed the boy's name is Finn. The next year, he told me confidently, he had another identical case which he was able to resolve immediately.

Blessed are those who hunger of righteousness and are pure in heart. Ted was one of the first priests to go digital and had somewhat mastered emails. Some emails weren't quite right. He phoned me seeking help with all the spam coming into his inbox. The emails were from www.gg.gov.au seeking approval for awards. I explained gg has nothing to do with horses. I rang the Governor

General Honours-in-Confidence department. The polite officer assured me that all is legitimate. Ted's question was "Who could have done this?" Your friends, your parishioners, perhaps it does have something to do with the gee-gees. All in good humour.

Blessed are the poor in spirit. Since his hospitalisation in May 2020 and again in November 2021, he showed great humility and spirit. He would ask me "What would happen to me?" In May 2020 he dearly wanted to go back to his unit. In December last year, he wanted to go back to Bethlehem Home. I assured him that like Mary and Joseph he will be in Bethlehem for Christmas. We shared a laugh. What we didn't know then that he will be in the Eternal Jerusalem on the feast of the Epiphany. In his time at Bendigo Health he received excellent medical, nursing and spiritual care. Sacraments and the rosary in particular. While no visitors were allowed during lockdowns staff from the pastoral care Team would pray a decade of the rosary at his bedside. When he would receive the Eucharist he struggled to make the sign of the cross and some of the prayers. Fr Timothy Ratcliffe, an English Dominican was able to articulate well his experience that almost paralleled Fr Ted's experiences:

He writes in 2021: My experience of illness was embraced by two great Marian feasts, The Assumption and the Immaculate Conception both about Mary's body: the beginning of her life and her sharing in Christ's victory over death. In the days after my operation, it was almost

impossible to pray. I ran out of steam after the first words of the Our Father. Two prayers sustained me: the daily Eucharist live-streamed from Blackfriars, and the Hail Mary, whose few words embrace the drama of bodily life, from the conception of her child, then one pregnant woman greeting another, and finally our prayers for help to live this present moment and face its end, “now and at the hour of our death”.

Fr Ted, with 37 years parish priest of Holy Rosary Parish had a deep devotion to the rosary and to Our Lady. One Sunday while all the churches were locked down, I visited Bethlehem at 10 in the morning to anoint a dying resident. Ted was in the common room, front seat intently watching Fr Rob Galea’s live streamed Mass on the big screen. His expression, similar to the front cover of today’s booklet, it was quiet, very attentive and happy. I did not want to disturb him. Quickly looking around he was certainly Fr Rob’s number one fan in that room of about 30 residents.

We offer our thanks for all who cared for Ted while in the parish, his retirement, in Bendigo Health and Mercy Health Bethlehem.

May we finish with the final words from each of the readings

“We rejoice that God has saved us.”

“Hope to Christ Jesus and to all who have longed for our Lord’s call and eternal presence.”

“Rejoice and be glad your reward will be great in heaven.”

To Fr Ted

Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord.

All: And let perpetual light shine upon him.

May he rest in peace.

All: Amen.

May his soul and the souls of all the faithful departed,
through the mercy of God, rest in peace.

All: Amen.