

RIP FR BOB

On September 3 2016, Fr Bob Markey died peacefully at the age of 89 at Corpus Christi, Clayton where he had spent his final years. Fr Bob moved from his residence at Bannockburn in late 2014. Fr Bob had served in a number of parishes in the Diocese including Warracknabeal, Ararat, Bungaree, Horsham, Linton, Maryborough, Terang, Cororooke, Simpson and Cressy.

Fr Bob was born on October 9, 1926 and ordained in Melbourne on July 27, 1953. He retired in 1996 and celebrated his 60 years of ordination to the priesthood in 2013. Fr Bob's Funeral Mass was held in St Patrick's Cathedral, Ballarat on September 8, 2016 with Bishop Paul Bird as main celebrant and priests of the Diocese concelebrating. Family and friends participated in the Mass.



Fr John McKinnon's homily at Fr Bob's Funeral Mass can be read below:

We're here because of one man: all of us touched somehow by him, yet each of us, I suspect, reacting with a different mix of feelings, with varying depths of intensity.

Over the last thirty years, Bob and I had become close friends. What brought us together was a shared love of the bush and of the water. The broader reaches of the sea were Bob's preference, while the quieter inland waterways were mine. For neither of us was our preference exclusive; so over those thirty years, we spent many a holiday fronting the wide waters and winds of the Whitsundays or the Gippsland Lakes or strenuously paddling the Wimmera River or the Murray and its tributaries. I came to know him as we chatted around our makeshift campfires or in the darkness of the warm evenings.

Over the past few days I have been asking myself just who was Bob – Bob the man, Bob the priest.

My sense is that he owed much to his mother. On their small, isolated farm of his Riverina childhood, she took on the role of teacher in a pre-eminent way. She loved nature; she loved reading, too, and handed on both treasures to the impressionable Bob. She nurtured his encyclopedic mind, a talent to improvise, and a readiness to live simply – and to enjoy it immensely.

The family had to move off the farm while Bob was still a boy. It was then that they came to Ballarat. I suspect that it was from that experience that he drew the emotional intensity that fuelled his loathing of bureaucrats, whether civil or ecclesiastical, along with his rebellious response to whatever he saw as injustice – the point of entry of the Spirit that had anointed Third Isaiah [as we heard in today's First Reading]. I also wonder if it gave him a quiet sense of solidarity with people who have migrated to this land for sheer family survival. Together with his sister Jeanie, Bob had an especially soft spot for India. Both travelled there on numerous occasions and devoted time and effort to assist small-time development projects in Kerala and elsewhere.

As his mother and his early experience made a big impact on his temperament and attitudes, so, too, did B.A. Santamaria. After leaving St Pat's, Bob had gone to work as an apprentice at the Railway Workshops in Newport. He became an ardent and trusted supporter, agent and friend of Mr Santamaria. Later, after he had been through the seminary and ordained a priest, he became a loyal chaplain to the anti-Communist movements and to the National Catholic Rural Movement.

Bob was interested in the developing technology and saw its potential as a means of evangelism. When the Church was allocated a free monthly half-hour on the local television network, BTV 6, in the 1960s and '70s, Bob persuaded Bishop O'Collins to provide him with a state-of-the-art movie camera and associated equipment. With these he proceeded to make a succession of locally-produced programs on the life and history of the diocese.

Bob had been ordained a priest in 1953, about ten years or so before the Vatican Council. As was the case with many of the priests of his era, the Council came to him as a surprise. They had not been formed for change; and many struggled to make sense of the liturgical, catechetical and pastoral reforms that were introduced. Bob's natural inclination was certainly not liturgical propriety; nor were the new approaches to catechetics quite his thing. He did, however, rejoice in the increased responsibility given to the laity in the newly created pastoral councils.



L-R: Fr James Kerr, Fr Michael O'Toole, Fr Bob and Fr John McKinnon on the occasion of Fr Bob's 60th Anniversary on Ordination to the Priesthood.

The first of Bob's appointments as Parish Priest was at Simpson. Large tracts of the Heytesbury had just been opened up for closer settlement; and the parish of Simpson had been created for the young and growing families who came to farm them, many of them Dutch migrants. The struggles of Bob's family during his Riverina childhood gave him an immediate and precious rapport. For Bob they were truly happy years; and he was later reluctant to have to move northwards to Cressy when eventually transferred there.

Bob had an uncomplicated piety. God mattered to him. The Breviary was important, if rubrics were not. People were important. He had an openness to all in need and a disarming simplicity. As I listened to the Reading from St Paul's Letter to the Corinthians, I thought just how closely Paul's description fitted comfortably with Bob: "Love is patient and kind; it is never jealous; love is never boastful or conceited; it is never rude or selfish; it does not take offence, and is not resentful ...". A life lived like that has set him up to live contentedly in eternity.

As I look back, I do wonder what was behind our friendship. Bob and I differed on many issues – and at times Bob could express himself irascibly. Early on, we had agreed by mutual consensus, that whenever we went on holidays, we would talk neither politics nor theology. And it worked! Our friendship was respectful; it was warm; it was fun; it was deep and supportive. The only answer to my wondering that I can come up with is that it was a simple and beautiful gift of God. For that I am deeply grateful.

Before I conclude, I think it important to recognize explicitly and thank three people particularly. A valiant support to Bob over his many years as parish priest and then during his retirement was his faithful housekeeper, Maggie. Each adopted a remarkably caring attitude for each other. Indeed, Bob may have been lost without her. From among us priests, I especially single out Michael O'Toole, who showed a thoughtful and genuine care for Bob, providing hospitality when needed and ensuring that he was not forgotten in any local clergy gatherings. Finally, I thank Sonia Walker, the Clergy Health and Wellbeing Coordinator for us priests of the diocese, who kept a close eye on Bob as his health and independence deteriorated. As priests, we are particularly blessed by the depth, warmth and sensitivity of Sonia's interest in us and reassured by her professional competence.

As we know, the risen Jesus enjoyed a campfire breakfast with his chosen disciples after his resurrection. We can be sure our heavenly home, spoken about in today's Gospel, will be no less warm and personal. May Bob enjoy the company there eternally.

Fr John McKinnon