



Requiem Mass for Mr Henry Sproxton

Homily

**Most Rev Bishop Don Sproxton
Auxiliary Bishop of Perth**

**Saturday 12 July 2014
Our Lady of Victories Church, Floreat Wembley**

Passed peacefully into Eternal Life on 6th July at the Little Sisters of the Poor, Glendalough, aged 91.

The small portion of the Gospel of Matthew we have just heard has been chosen for this funeral Mass because it was the last word my father received in the scriptures before he gave up his spirit to God.

“Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest. Shoulder my yoke and learn from me....my yoke is easy and my burden light”.

It was during the celebration of the Mass with him on Sunday that I had the privilege to proclaim the Good News to him: that he has in Christ a powerful Saviour on whom he could lean as he was dying, and that the burden laid on Dad’s shoulders is light because it is the faith.

The faith, which Dad explicitly accepted early last year, was offered to him without conditions or demands. He experienced only gracious giving from God and the people around him at the Little Sisters. His response was to say, 'yes' to Jesus and from that point, his demeanor changed, becoming calmer and more reconciled to his situation, assured by the daily encounter he had with Christ in Holy Communion.

This did not mean that he would no longer feel frustration, but he learnt to manage the irritations and difficulties his declining health imposed.

Since Dad passed over to eternal life on Sunday afternoon, we have found ourselves being flooded by so many memories of the places and experiences we have shared. Quite a number relate to travel. He loved to take us on holidays in our caravan, especially to Augusta. It was like going home, for it was to this region that his family migrated from Britain to make a new life.

Things did not turn out as the family expected and their journey took them to other places, in other directions, searching for work and other opportunities. Making a journey, I think, became a theme in Dad’s life, formed as he was by those early experiences of being a migrant child and moving so often.



The journeying spirit is one that is seeking and learning. Dad's journeying spirit took him to new and difficult places. It took him to theatres of war in Timor, New Guinea and New Britain, in the company of outstandingly courageous brothers at arms. By stepping out, enlisting with the Army in 1941 with the reluctant permission of his father, he would become a foundation member of the Second Independent Company. He became part of a new family of commando brothers, an association that remained firm for over 70 years. The war and the 2/2 Commando Squadron (as it came to be known), were also formative for him and his comrades. The war ended when Dad was only 22. He and the others have carried the deep scars of the war with them to their deaths.

It was while on service in New Guinea that he was nearly killed, not due to the fighting, but simply because of a dental abscess. In an effort to remove the tooth and abscess, Dad's tooth snapped at the gum. The pain was intense and more anesthetic was administered, when his heart stopped. "The b.....s gone and died on us!" The doctor yelled. A medical orderly jumped in and turned Dad on his side and pummeled him until his heart started again. Dad apparently sat up and for days bruising appeared all over him. From that day, Dad had an uneven bite due to the badly mutilated jaw: something that would have annoyed him given his determination as a builder to have everything lined up perfectly!

Dad's journey continued into peacetime. It was not terribly long after he was discharged that he married our mother, Thelma. She was placed in his life to be in every sense his soul mate. He would have surprised his family when he brought a Catholic home for them to meet. However, Dad related after Mum's death, that his mother came to love and respect Thelma. He has said many times as well how impressed he was by her faith.

Dad's journey through life, I believe, was fundamentally part of a plan, the plan of God. Set in his heart was the thirst to find the truth. To help him, he was given a partner in his wife. It was natural, then, for us to have a photo of them together on Dad's funeral booklet.

Mum was a quiet and patient partner. She had qualities that complemented Dad's. Where he was very particular and precise, a perfectionist, she was able to be relaxed and content with what they had. She was always faithful and loyal. He would say how grateful he had been to have her by his side. They both loved and cherished Kerry, my sister and me, and they were able to welcome their grandchildren, Stephen, Catherine, Tim and Mikaela. Only Dad would live to see his great-grandchildren.

Their lives together in this life ended in 1996 and it seemed a catastrophe as Mum had been his main carer for 10 years. We wondered whether Dad would give up the struggle. But it seems to me that the words of our first reading from the Book of Lamentations were fulfilled in him.

The author of Lamentations regained hope in his life when he realised that God continues to grant favours, even in the present moment, and that His kindnesses are never exhausted. Dad, though



missing the support of 'the love of his life', found the strength to fight on. The seeking and searching spirit within him discovered trust in God, and God was faithful to him. There was no limit to the grace and strength he received from God. Dad was to live for another 18 years after Thelma's passing.

The themes of journey and blessing in his life lead us to think of his long struggle with illness. I have said to people that he was a living almanac of medical conditions and complications!

Dad has been ill for nearly a third of his life. The words of the second reading spoke of the frail and failing body being trained to bear the sufferings during our earthly journey, so that we may be able to carry the weight of eternal glory. These words encourage us to never give up and to see in our experiences their power to train us and strengthen us.

This, of course, requires faith, the faith to know the presence of God in each moment because he loves us so intensely, and to know that only with the Spirit of God being allowed to grow within us, we have all that is needed to get through and to become what we are meant to be.

Earlier I said that Dad had explicitly accepted the faith last year. This occurred when he made his Profession of Faith and was baptised. He told me of his desire, unbeknownst to him, on the feast of the Baptism of the Lord. It came as a surprise. Although we would talk about the things that I would be doing or an issue in the Church that he had heard reported on the news, he never spoke about becoming a Catholic.

Yet in many ways Jesus was preparing him for this big step. Throughout his life, Christ was very near, offering him what was needed for Dad to know him. Evelyn Waugh once called this the Twitch on the Thread: drawing our attention drawn to the God who is there and calling us onward.

Having run the race to the end, completed his journey to the Lord, let us pray for Dad as he takes the final steps to be with God who loves him, and who has been his companion at all the stages of his journey.

May eternal rest be granted unto him, O Lord, and may perpetual light shine on him. May he rest in peace. Amen.