

Fr Tim Norris Eulogy *spoken by Rod Wilson*

Your Eminence, Your Grace, Reverend Fathers, especially his good friends Frs Pat McHugh, Michael Rego, John Gillen, Derek Long – classmates Frs Mark Spora and Vince Dwyer and a special friend Rev Ron Holt from the Uniting Church and members of Fr Tim's flock.

Former Parish Council Chairman Justin McCoy used to say "once a St Kevin's parishioner, always a St Kevin's parishioner." How true.

I'm Rod Wilson and between 1981 and 2001 I was part of St Kevin's.

Our 4 daughters attended school here and at various times I was Parish Council Chairman, parish council secretary, Chairman of the Finance Committee and organiser of the Planned Giving Programs and involved in the school.

I became very close to Fr Norris over those years and he was an outstanding mentor, coach and friend to me and my family.

Thank you – the parishioners of St Kevin's – for giving me the honour of speaking about Father on your behalf. Both Tess Livingstone, who you all know well, and I collaborated on this Eulogy.

A few years ago, Father visited a Churchyard in Ireland where 2 Parish Priests were buried. He laughed when it was suggested that the message on one of the gravestones might suit his one day. With unabashed pride it said: "If you want a monument look around."

Everything you see in these grounds today was built by him, and the parishioners from a defunct farm from August 1959 onwards. He raised funds in the 1961 credit squeeze when money was impossible to get by persuading the Postmaster General Sir Alan Hume, the local member, to lean on the Commonwealth Bank. No mean feat and even Archbishop Duhig, James the Builder, was amazed.

Far more important, however, was Father's success in building the faith of 3 or 4 generations of parishioners and schoolchildren. He began by knocking on doors, gathering local Catholics down at the old RSL Hall for Mass, starting a sacramental program for the children and planned giving. He lived in farm hut but had to seek shelter elsewhere when the roof fell in one night in a storm. For 53 years he took Archbishop Duhig's advice to heart. "Don't form committees but get people around you who can help you."

To gauge their efforts, look around. That will not be the message on Father's gravestone, however. At his wish it will carry the same wording as the second priest's gravestone in Ireland, spoken by Simeon when he saw the baby Jesus: "Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace...for my eyes have seen your salvation."

That grave, incidentally, belonged to Father's favourite professor at St Patrick's College Carlow, where he began his seminary training in 1948. It was there that he acquired wisdom as well as knowledge and where his natural compassion, humility and goodness matured before he accepted a place at the Pontifical Urban University in Rome. There he excelled in sacramental theology, handball and acquired a strong love of Rome and Italy that was rewarded years later when a large Italian community worshipped here for almost 20 years.

Father was feisty, determined and no milk-and-water plaster cast saint. Think of his dry wit at meetings where he could not bear rambling platitudes on butcher's papery! He knew how to use humour to temper his stubbornness. During the row over general absolution which he never used he joked to his neighbouring priests that he has a parish of "king sized sinners" who needed individual attention. And actually, people came in droves, seeking his firm but kind counsel.

As the eldest child of a large family in a small home his determination was forged by age 11 when he won the only scholarship in his district to the local secondary school. Years later, the same determination was evident in his pursuit of reluctant souls, whom he rescued in droves. He had a special touch – he knew when to turn up at the bedside in his black clericals and when he would get further in his golf gear. He liked shopping because he could keep an eye out for those he hadn't seen at Mass for a few weeks. "I saw so and so scurrying down the breakfast cereal aisle," he might say. Invariably they'd scurry into Mass the following Sunday. Generations of children and parents knew his special thanksgiving prayers for after Communion that he learned as a child and that are in the 2nd edition of *Golden Priest, Wooden Chalice*.

As a schoolboy earning money for his family footing turf, milking cows and binding corn on local farms in the holidays he worked hard, did well at hurling, was an avid reader and loved the countryside around Limerick's Golden Vale. As one of his favourite songs, *Limerick You're a Lady* goes: "As children you and I spent endless days of fun in winter's snow or summer's gold sun. We fished in silver streams, the fabric of my dreams was fashioned by your loveliness and so I have to say..."

A highly talented and intelligent man who was fortunate enough to realise his vocation, he aspired to the ideals of Saint John Vianney, the patron saint of Parish priests and 19th century French priest Lacordaire who defined a priest as one who would "share all sufferings; penetrate all secrets; go from men to God and offer him their prayers; to return from God to men to bring pardon and hope; with a heart of fire for charity and a heart of bronze for chastity and who would teach and pardon, console and bless."

For Father in practical terms that meant ministering to four generations of many families. He spoke with depth and conviction in the pulpit and as soon as he opened with "Today my dear people" we sat up and listened. His sermons made us think. He never tired of pastoral work even when he was unwell in later years. He was always there _ to give strength to grieving families, to counsel a young Aboriginal mum whose child he had to bury, to visit every school class once a term, leading prayers at the Dawn Services and knocking several times on the doors of families to break the news their sons had been killed in Vietnam.

It is worth noting here that Fr had a natural rapport with non-catholics in the area.

He was a very happy priest who delighted in the achievements of St Kevin's School children decades after they graduated and who relished parish celebrations. His tastes were simple and good – he couldn't swim but loved a surf at Rainbow Bay . He couldn't ski but enjoyed the fresh air of being out in the snow if it was sunny. Relaxing with a tasty roast chicken lunch and a glass of wine and a video of *Yes Minister* was preferable to flash restaurants, although he loved Gambaro's spaghetti and fish. In recent years, the new translation of the Mass warmed his heart, as did visiting Domus Australia in Rome in early 2012.

As someone educated on a scholarship, Archbishop Coleridge's Mary MacKillop foundation to help educate poorer children appealed to him immensely. At this school no Catholic child was ever turned away because of their family's inability to pay. Parish and school were one, and building up the school from 100 pupils in the early 1980s to more than 350 today was one of his passions. When it came to worldly goods, Father mirrored the values of his Carlow professors, who assured him, when he arrived without the good quality clothes of the other students that "such things are of no great moment." While he was no socialist and valued security and wanted to see people making efforts rather than relying on handouts, he was the antithesis of a materialist.

His was a big life, reflected in the Australian, Irish and Papal flags covering the remains of his head, heart and feet. His was a full generous and courageous life, on the frontlines of a period of upheaval in the church. As Lacordaire wrote, "My God, what a life. And it is yours O priest of Jesus Christ."

In conclusion – We the parishioners' will miss you greatly – thank you for your faith, your example, your guidance, your leadership and your legacy – a model of a vibrant and successful Parish and School.

Rev Fr Tim Norris – Rest in God's peace – a job well done.