

# Homily at Gareth's Funeral

Allan White OP

## *Readings:*

Daniel 12:1-3 *Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament.*

1 John: 3:1-2 *When he appears we shall be like him.*

Matthew: 11:25-30 *Come to me, all who labour*

I first met Gareth thirty years ago, almost to the day. I was a guest at Quarr Abbey. I was considering on which path the Lord was leading me; he was already a monk of Quarr. It was his duty that week to serve at the guests' table in the refectory. One day, a Friday I think, he brought in a collection of dishes that included a very unappetizing looking fish, a kind of bloaters or something, and a dish of white, lumpy sauce that looked suspiciously like rice pudding. The guests eyed each other nervously while Gareth looked at us encouragingly. All of us had heard of the horrors of the monastic cuisine, so we embarked on this voyage of gastronomic discovery obediently, if not with enthusiasm. I poured the white sauce on the bloaters and stoically munched my way through it. The white sauce was, of course, rice pudding. Gareth had mixed the dishes up and brought them all at the same time! The first time I was treated to his wonderful smile was when he realized his mistake and saw the rueful expression of the guests. I shall not see that smile again this side of eternity, and how it pains me.

I have always thought that this first encounter said something about both of us. It showed Gareth's flair, sense of adventure, experimentation and imagination; all qualities that he was to show to great effect in later years. It showed my docility and sense of obedience, all qualities that have been so absent from my own life ever since, as my brethren will confirm. I will show that obedience today by obeying his instruction not to preach for too long. After that first encounter at Quarr, how surprised we were ten years later to meet up once more, both in Dominican habits as brothers in the same house, both students in the school of the Lord's service that is at the heart of any form of religious life. It is amazing what monastic food can do for you!

In today's gospel Jesus says: 'Come to me'. Every religious has

heard the voice of the Lord saying to them 'Come'. It is a summons to a pilgrimage, a journey of exploration and discovery. The invitation Jesus gives today is quite specific: Come and learn, learn from me: join my school, become my students. Gareth had a passion for study. What made him such a good teacher was that he never ceased from learning. It was a constant source of amazement to me that one little head could contain so much; being yoked in the Lord's service also means being bound to his school, Gareth never forgot that. He learned from the Lord who is all true; his passion for truth characterized everything he did.

Dominicans sit in the school of the Lord and in that school even the professors, or as we call them, the lecturers, the readers, are constantly learning. What enables them to learn is humility of heart, docility. Gareth was one of the gentlest men I have ever met. It was a gentleness that he learned in the Lord's school. Dominicans are supposed to display that virtue which St Thomas calls *studiositas*. We can sometimes be misled into thinking that study in itself is a virtue, that it is the goal and end of our lives, it is not. We are not encouraged to look for academic achievement or glory for its own sake, the aim is not to make us into super-brains, but to make us good, to make us holy, to make us worthy pupils of the Master so that others may come and learn of us who are to be gentle and lowly of heart, so that they may find rest for their souls. The rest they seek is the peace and rest of reconciliation. Dominicans are not only to be good students and good preachers but good confessors. They do not bring the most recent theory about predestination to their long-suffering congregations, or belabour them with the latest view on Chaldee drainage systems in Ur, they are meant to bring them Jesus. In the end every mendicant teacher must echo what Peter says before the beautiful gate of the Temple in Jerusalem, 'gold and silver, I have none, but in the name of Jesus Christ arise.' We study the name and follow the way. Our function is simply that: to speak the name and to summon to the way.

In the brute world in which we live knowledge is often seen as power. The kind of knowledge that most of the popular press aspires to, and which is the bread and butter of soap opera, is the acquisition of knowledge that can destroy or deflate people. The idea being not to show that some people are weak or even hypocritical, but that most are, and those who are not are fools for not accepting how the world really is. Gareth's pursuit of knowledge was the search for life-giving truth. He was a wise man for whom truth was not destructive or a threat, but spacious and good. If the world thinks that such a wise man be a fool, what a judgment on the world. Its kind of knowledge is believed to confer a certain kind of superiority, it is the knowledge consequent on Eve's bite of the apple, the knowledge that goes together with original sin. We can wrongly desire to know if we are proud and wish to use our

knowledge to dominate in a calculating kind of way. The truth is meant to set you free not to enslave you.

Dominican study is designed not to conform us to the worldly pattern of academic success; as we know, the academic world is in greater disarray now than it has been for decades. Dominican study is designed to enable us to grow in wisdom, to be learned in the ways of the Lord, to be a disciple in the school of the Lord's service, so that we might bring others to drink from that same well which nourishes us. One of the great rabbis of the Hassidic tradition of Israel once wrote:

'Woe to him who has no courtyard yet makes a gate for the same.'

Learning, study, is the gate through which we enter the courtyard, which is the life of holiness and wonder in God's presence. The one who builds the entry without concern for the courtyard will not prosper. Study and learning must go together with the search for a close attachment to the Lord. Gareth wasted no time on building the fine gateway, for him the courtyard was the centre. Building gateways with no courtyard is not the Dominican way. In our Constitutions the passages dealing with study are placed, not with formation, but with the following of Christ. We learn about God with God. Our studies are not primarily to produce scholars but saints.

In the Book of Daniel it is written:

Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like stars forever and ever.

Gareth was gentle and wise, he will shine like the brightness of the sky and like the stars. We give thanks for his life and try to accept and understand his death in faith and hope, learning from the Lord who was gentle and lowly of heart. We pray that it is in that most Sacred Heart that Gareth will find his home for ever.

Eternal rest give unto him, and let perpetual light shine upon him. May he rest in peace. Amen