

Homily for the Funeral Mass of Bishop John Jukes OFM Conv.
By Bishop Howard Tripp

My Brothers and Sisters,

There have been many excellent and comprehensive obituaries of Bishop John and I am sure you would not wish me to turn this homily into a second rate synopsis of them. Bishop John would expect at this point in the Mass a homily – not an obituary and certainly not a eulogy. In fact he was strongly opposed to the latter.

May I ask, “Were you surprised this morning by the Second Reading?” If you were, it would have pleased Bishop John. He chose this reading from the First Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians for his Sister's Funeral.

In Chapter 13 Saint Paul writes a great hymn about love, and that is why we associate this reading with marriages rather than with funerals. St Paul own short summary of what he had written is *“There are three things that last: Faith, Hope and Love; and the greatest of these is Love.”* There is however a great deal more in this chapter of the Epistle than a hymn about Love.

Consider the words, *“For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophesying is imperfect; but once perfection comes, all imperfect things will disappear... Now we are seeing a dim reflection in a mirror; but then we shall be seeing face to face. The knowledge that I have now is imperfect; but then I shall know as fully as I am known”*.

By faith we already know God, but only imperfectly as by an image reflected in the mirror of creation. We believe that in the Beatific Vision we shall see God in a way beyond our wildest dreams. *“No eye has seen and no ear has heard, things beyond the mind of man, all that God has prepared for those who love him”*. St Paul assures us that we shall see God face to face, that we shall know him as fully as we are known.

In recent years there have been two deaths that greatly affected Bishop John and caused him to meditate, not upon the mystery of death, but upon the mystery of Heaven. His reflections based in faith have been accompanied by hope. He has been looking forward to the life that is to come for us all and has said on a number of occasions that he had many questions to put to God the Father.

The first death that prompted him to meditate on Heaven was the death of Father Basil Heiser. Father Basil was an American who had been the Minister General of the Conventual Franciscans and spent much of his life in Rome working in the Curia. In 2009 Father Basil celebrated Mass and preached on his hundredth birthday. Bishop John's last visit to Rome was to see Father Basil just before that birthday and they obviously talked about Heaven. When he came home Bishop John wrote a small Treatise on "Heaven" for Father Basil who never received it because he died quite suddenly a few days after the birthday. Bishop John offered this labour of love for publication but unfortunately the publisher considered it too short a work.

The second death that focused Bishop John's attention on Heaven was that of his Sister, Mrs Josephine Brown, who died less than two years ago. When he and she knew that she was dying, he wrote a touching letter to her, full of faith and trust in God, which he read to us at her funeral in Ashford, which was the occasion of his last visit to this his native diocese. At her funeral the Second Reading was the same as the one that we have heard this morning and was the subject of his homily on that occasion.

On both occasions he manifested his deep Faith in the reality of Heaven, and his confident hope of God's mercy and love.

It was his deep understanding of the Faith that enabled Bishop John to do so much to promote in others an understanding of the Teachings of the Church. It was Hope and Love that motivated him to do this. And the Love that I mean is the Love that St John speaks of when he says in his First Epistle, "*This is the Love I mean, not our love for God but God's love for us*"

Bishop Jukes was born on the 7th August 1923 in Eltham and baptised soon afterwards as Peter Ignatius. The name John was imposed upon him more than twenty years later by the Franciscans when he made his first profession. To his eleven nephews and nieces he remains to this day "Uncle Peter". And may I at this point in my homily say a word of condolence to all Bishop John's Family and express our gratitude to his family for the gift of Bishop John to the Church and this Diocese in particular. The gratitude is mutual for the family have asked me to express to the Diocese their thanks for all that the Diocese has done for their Uncle Peter.

Bishop John delighted in his religious name. A year or two after his Episcopal Ordination here in this Cathedral on 30th January 1980 he presided at the Feastday Mass at St John's Seminary, Wonersh, and revealed the fact that he was baptised Peter. He went on to say however that he was very happy to share the name of the beloved disciple with the Seminary. Bishop John was conscious that he was one beloved of God, and suggested to the students that they needed to realise and take to heart that they too were loved by God. It is not just our human love for God that should motivate us. We should be motivated in a strong response to the wonderful supernatural love that God first bestows on us.

John, the beloved disciple, made a place for Mary, the Mother of Jesus, in his home. In imitation Bishop John made a home in the Hermitage at West Malling for his own mother when she could no longer look after herself. And he found Mrs Patricia Murphy to care for her and nurse her in her final illness. Pat then became his housekeeper and in these latter years has, through her nursing skill, enabled him to continue his life to the very end as a bishop and priest, offering Mass every day and serving the people of God in many ways even in his retirement. I offer our deep thanks to Pat for all she did for our Bishop John and express our sympathy with her in her great loss. Bishop John's family again have asked me to associate them with the Diocese in expressing sympathy and thanks to Pat. And that I am very happy to do.

In short, then my dear sisters and brothers, we see in the life of Bishop John faith, hope and love and the greatest of these is love. It is in the life of a Christian that we should see scripture interpreted. Bishop John preached many sermons and the greatest of them was his own life.

I have studiously avoided allowing this homily to become either an obituary or a eulogy. However it appears to me that I ought to say something of Bishop John's Life. The year 1946 was important for during that year Bishop John worked on a sheep farm on the Romney Marshes. At the same time he met the Conventual Friars Minor at Rye, and through them discovered his vocation. He was called not to care for sheep but to care for people. There is no doubt that the Conventual Friars played an important role in developing the human, intellectual and spiritual talents that God had given the young shepherd.

In 1979 they elected him to be their minister provincial, but almost immediately had generously to let him go when the Holy Father called him to be a bishop. On behalf of the people and priests of this diocese, our bishops, religious sisters and brothers and our deacons, I acknowledge the debt we owe to the Sons of St Francis for an outstanding bishop whom they formed and prepared for the Episcopate.

Throughout his eighty eight years, 65 of them as a religious, 59 as a priest and 32 as a bishop, for love of Jesus, he has served his Master's flock in a thousand and one ways, too many for me to name them all and so I will not attempt to do so, but I leave it to each of you to make your own list.

It was especially as a Parish Priest that he manifested that he was a true shepherd; imitating his Master he knew his own and his own knew him. There are three parishes that have been especially blessed to have him as Parish Priest: St Clare's Manchester in the Diocese of Salford, St Patrick's Waterloo in this Diocese and St Maragret's Huntly in the Diocese of Aberdeen. The people of these parishes have known him as a shepherd and teacher.

As a shepherd he was always an assiduous visitor of the people. The priests in Kent got to know that – when he went on Visitation he would inspect the Parish Registers, but he would also want to get his hands on their visiting books, so that he might go out and do some visiting. It is reported that on one such occasion, when wearing one of his woolly hats no doubt, he knocked on the door of a house, and the woman immediately led him down to the cellar – she thought he was coming to read the gas meter. // Challenged on another occasion with the words “What do you want, why are you calling?” He said, “Because I love you” – or rather because God loves you.

As a teacher for the love of God Bishop John worked in Huntly throughout each week thinking out his Sermon for Sunday, wanting to make sure that the faith of the people was richly nourished; and producing a weekly newsletter in which he really taught his people their Faith. He was a born teacher.

I have spoken of the Faith that believes in Heaven and of the Hope that waits for Heaven. But the essence of the Beatific Vision for us will be to know fully and openly that we are loved by God who is Love. Our Gospel today was the final part of the priestly prayer of Christ, the Son of God who acclaims to his Father, “*I have made your Name known to them*, (that is to those for whom he has just prayed) *and I will continue to make it known so that the love with which you loved me may be in them, and so that I may be in them*”. It is surely because the love of God is in the souls of those who are in Heaven that they enjoy the light, peace and happiness of the Beatific Vision, seeing God as St Paul says “*face to face*”. May our prayers and Masses aid Bishop John in his rapid passage through the waters of purgatory that, made new, he may stand before the throne of the God who loved him, and out of whose love he loved all of us.

“Farewell, John, but not for ever! dear brother”.