

Emmanuel Cathedral - Sat 24 November 2018
Homily preached on the Feast of Christ the King
at a Memorial Mass for Paddy Kearney
by Raymond Perrier

Readings: Dan 7: 13-14; Ps 93: 1-5; Rev 1: 5-8; Jn 18:33b-37

“And I saw one like a son of Man come down on clouds of heaven” (Dan 7: 13)

Paddy was old enough to be of a generation of Catholic boys and girls who were brought up to end their prayers every night by reflecting on the ‘Four Last Things’: Death, Judgement, Heaven and Hell. I can see from those who are smiling in the congregation that there are others here who are old enough to remember reflecting on the ‘Four Last Things’: Death, Judgement, Heaven and Hell.

We don't generally encourage young Catholics to reflect on the ‘Four Last Things’ these days. But this weekend, which is the last weekend of the Church's year, is the time when the readings of the lectionary - this Sunday and in the week before and the week after - ask us to reflect on those ‘Four Last Things’: Death, Judgement, Heaven and Hell. So it is appropriate that this is the weekend that we face Paddy's death.

However much we reflect on death, however much we experience it in our lives, it's still hard to make sense of it. I know that there are people in this congregation this evening who have recently suffered very profound experiences of the death of people close to them. Paddy's own family are this weekend coming to terms with the tragedy of his shocking, untimely death. And that loss is something being experienced not only by them but by all of us here this evening. We gather to remember Paddy, to pray for him, and to seek some comfort for ourselves.

So we find ourselves here in this Cathedral tonight feeling a very deep pain: the pain of having lost someone we loved dearly, who taught us, who inspired us, who often challenged us and who (we thought!) would live forever. And it occurred to me that, almost 15 years ago, Paddy himself stood in this same Cathedral with exactly that same feeling of pain and loss. Because the death of his hero and mentor, Archbishop Hurley, left him with the pain of losing someone who taught him, inspired him, challenged him; someone who, at the age of almost 90, really did look as if he would live forever!

We feel that pain tonight, we felt that pain last night, we know that we going to continue to feel that pain for many more nights to come. Paddy felt that same pain at the death of Hurley. But he transformed the pain into a passion. From Hurley's death, he found new life. At an age in his life when many men would be considering retirement and pottering around on a golf course, Paddy turned that

pain into the passion to embark upon the last great project of his life: the creation of the Denis Hurley Centre.

I never really talked to Paddy much about death but he was certainly somebody who was full of life. It's interesting that the Scripture quote that he chose for the foundation stone of the Denis Hurley Centre are these words from the Gospel of John: "I have come that you may have life and life to the full!" (Jn 10:10).

The Denis Hurley Centre is a place of life, even in the midst of death and despair and decay and doubt. A place for bringing light and life. Every time I saw Paddy he always seemed to be full of life - for the different projects we were engaged in, for the new projects that we were dreaming up, for the possibility of what the Denis Hurley Centre could do. I was amazed that somebody at his age had so much life, so many ideas, so much energy. And then I was even more shocked to discover that the Denis Hurley Centre was only a part of the life of this 76-year-old. Paddy was also involved in so many other things.

I only knew Paddy in the last few years of his life and I am embarrassed to say that I probably knew him for less time than almost anyone else here. So many of you knew him when he was younger and even more vibrant, even more full of life, involved in even more activities. Paddy was a man who certainly lived life to the full!

But what, I wonder, drove him? What was it that drove this quiet man, that gave him so much Spirit, so much energy to change the world? Being born into an Irish Catholic family was certainly part of it. Then being influenced by the Marist brothers at Saint Charles College in Pietermaritzburg, followed by 12 years in which Paddy himself was a member of the Marist Congregation. And then the influences on his life: of course Archbishop Hurley but also many other influences, some of whom are here in the Cathedral this evening.

But it seems to me what holds all of that together was his incredible openness to God's Spirit. Paddy was open to encountering the Spirit in so many different areas of life, so much more than we might have expected of a white Irish Catholic South African growing up in a religiously segregated Church and a racially segregated country. Paddy found God's Spirit in his Catholic tradition; but he also found God's Spirit in other Christian traditions as he immersed himself in the ecumenical movement. And then in other faith traditions as he became exposed to them. And then beyond the world of faith, he found God's spirit at work in politics, in the media and in the arts.

We are praying for Paddy this evening in the traditional ritual of this parish's Saturday evening Mass. But it is interesting that before this, the prayers for Paddy were from a group of Christians of many different traditions gathered last night at Diakonia. And that even before we had our first Christian prayers for Paddy, prayers had already been offered for him at the synagogue and at the mosques. He would have been delighted by that.

Paddy was someone who was not afraid to find the Spirit in all the places where the Spirit blows, inspired perhaps by Hurley's own motto: "Where the Spirit is, there is freedom." He was freed by the open-ness to seek out the Spirit in so many different places.

It seems to me that Paddy really embodied those three words that capture Catholic social teaching, which are so easy to say but so hard to live out: See, Judge, Act.

Paddy was a man who wasn't afraid to see, who wasn't afraid to look at the harsh reality of the world around him. So many others of his background would have been - and are - content to stay in their comfortable bubbles. But Paddy stepped outside that bubble to seek out situations in which he could be exposed to the reality of the South Africa he was growing up in. And in his 70s, he was still careering around the Province all the time, going to meetings to see and to hear about the lives of people affected by the modern problems of South Africa.

Having seen, he would pause and consider and then judge. I don't think I ever witnessed Paddy make a judgement on the spur of the moment. He would be presented with the options and then say: "Thank you very much, I'll go and think about them and come back to you." He was thoughtful, he was reflective. He would spend the time required to reach the truth of the matter, perhaps driven by the words of tonight's Gospel: "Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." (Jn 18:37).

And having found it, he wasn't afraid to confront the truth. Nor was he afraid to confront others with the truth. Of course that meant, in the bad old days of Apartheid, confronting the Nationalist government with the truth of the consequences of their horrendous policies. In Paddy's case, this led to him being harassed and threatened and even to being imprisoned. In the Gospel this evening we saw the confrontation between the quiet but certain Jesus and the arrogant and bullying Pilate. We cannot help but imagine similar confrontations between the quiet but certain Paddy Kearney and the arrogant and bullying forces of the Apartheid state.

Speaking 'Truth to Power' was the title of one of his biographies of Hurley and it is something that Paddy was also not afraid to do himself. And for Paddy that also meant being bold enough to voice Truth to his own Church. Some of us were with him only a few days ago at the Hurley lecture when Paddy pointedly drew attention to what he saw as an injustice within the Church. He asked the Vicar General of Cape Town Archdiocese, who is of course an old friend of his, about how the Church could be so uncaring and so complacent in the face of what Paddy saw as an injustice.

Most importantly, after See and Judge, Paddy would Act. There are many others who like Paddy sat on committees and commissions and did lots of thinking and lots of listening and lots of discussing. Paddy was one of the few who would then turn that thinking into action. He knew that it doesn't matter how much you See and Judge if you don't Act. Without that final step, you can't change the world.

Paddy took action himself and he also inspired others to take action. Well he sometimes inspired; he also persuaded, cajoled and occasionally, very gently and quietly, bullied people into action. I am only here in Durban, only here at the Denis Hurley Centre because of Paddy Kearney. Once I had moved here I discovered that 'being Paddied' was a Durban phenomenon and I was just one of many who had 'been Paddied'. I am sure that many of you in this congregation this evening have found yourself at some point in your life doing something because Paddy decided it was the best thing to do and he made sure that you reached that same conclusion: you too were Paddied.

And why did he do this? Well certainly not to build his own Kingdom. You could just see by the clothes he wore or the car he drove that Paddy wasn't remotely interested in building himself up. In fact, a funny story is told about a volunteer soon after the Denis Hurley Centre opened. She didn't really know the organisation and saw this rather dishevelled, older man pottering along towards the Centre, looking a bit lost, with his scraggly beard, his clothes a bit shabby, and carrying two plastic bags. The young woman immediately invited him into the dining room to eat lunch: she didn't realise that he was the Chair of the Trustees! Paddy of course was honoured to be mistaken for a homeless man.

The Gospel this evening tells us that, like Christ, we should not be building the sort of kingdom that this world recognises but rather be building God's Kingdom. And God's Kingdom is a Kingdom where everything is turned upside down: where the mighty are pulled down from their thrones and the lowly are lifted up. Paddy has now left this kingdom but we are left behind here. We are left behind in a kingdom where many of the mighty are still on their thrones (even if their faces are different from the mighty people from a few years ago); meantime most of the poor are still waiting to be lifted up, no matter how hard we have worked.

But we don't despair as Paddy didn't despair. I think he took comfort from a prayer associated with Oscar Romero - and how happy Paddy was that his other 'hero Archbishop' was now Saint Oscar, 'San Romero de las Americas', something Paddy really longed for. The prayer associated with San Romero talks about 'being workers not master builders' being 'ministers not messiahs'. It warns us that we are 'prophets of a future not our own'. We take on incomplete work that others have left behind and we leave work for others to complete. In the same way, Paddy picked up the work that Hurley left behind so he could take it a few steps forward to completion. And now we have to pick up Paddy's work and move it onwards.

I would tease Paddy that if, in Alan Paton's words, Hurley was 'the Guardian of the Light' that made Paddy 'the Guardian of the Guardian of the Light'. Now that we have been left behind, I guess we've just become 'the Guardians of the Guardian of the Guardian of the Light'! And, 24 years after apparent Liberation from injustice, there are still many points of darkness where we need to bring that light, many places that still need to be transformed in our Church, in our city and in our world.

And so where is Paddy now? We can't presume that he is in God's Kingdom but we can hope that he is. Moreover, we can be reassured by those great words of Matthew's Gospel (Mt 25: 31-46) which is actually the gospel for this feast day within a different liturgical cycle. That passage famously reminds us that every time we feed the hungry, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger or tend the sick, we are doing it to God. And every time we refuse to do that we are rejecting God-self. The promise of God's Kingdom is offered to those who do see God in the poor, the hungry, the stranger, the sick, the lonely and who reach out to them and care for them as Paddy did. There is further reassurance in the same chapter of that Gospel. Christ says words to the good disciple which we might feel sure Paddy is hearing this evening: "Well done, good and faithful servant, come and share in the joy of your master." (Mt 25: 23)