

**A FEW MORE  
REFLECTIONS  
OF A PARISHIONER**



**ST WINEFRIDE'S PARISH, NESTON**

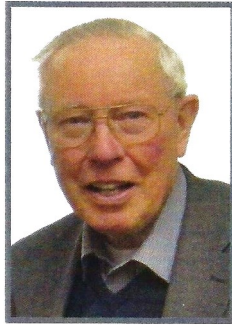
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*Fr Denis C. Marmion*

20th Nov 1930 - 13th Aug 2014

Ordained 27th November 1955



“All shall be well,  
and all shall be well  
and all manner of thing  
shall be well”

*Julian of Norwich*



**Dear Fr Denis,**

You left us too soon.

We were not ready.

We were unprepared.

You were our friend, a fellow pilgrim.

You helped us on our way.

You held out your hand to us when we stumbled:

You guided us when we were unsure which path to take.

You comforted us when we were troubled.

When we thought the road was too hard,

You supported us and encouraged us

We will miss you greatly,

But in our sadness, we will be happy for you.

For your pilgrimage is over.

You have succeeded in reaching the destination,

The goal you have striven towards all your life,

And you have enriched our lives on the way.

And your life has been a good life.

You dedicated it to God and to your fellow man.

We will pray for you.

Each time we join our hands in prayer,

We will remember you.

Each time we gather as a family,

We will remember you.

Each time we approach the altar to receive the body and blood of Christ,

We will remember you.

When you stand before God, Remember us.

## OUR HEAVENLY FATHER

*I myself taught Ephraim to walk.  
I took them in my arms;  
I led them with reins of kindness;  
With leading-strings of love.*

Hosea 11:3-4

We sat in my son's garden the other day and watched him running around playing with his two year old granddaughter Evie and I turned to my wife and shared a smile. We remembered when Sarah, our first grandchild and Evie's mum, was that age. We doted on her just as Mike and Debbie were now doting on their first grandchild. I thought of the rest of Mike's family, our other son and his family and our daughter and her family, each one individual, different and accomplished in their own ways. I felt a deep joy within me as I realised how much I loved them and will love them always no matter what.

The following day, we sat in my daughter's garden listening to our grandson's account of the year he had just spent abroad in France and Italy. He talked of the many cities he had visited and the architecture and the people. He showed us many photographs and again I was filled with an overwhelming joy. I felt so much love for my family and wanted so much for them.

There have been many times in my life when I have asked why, why Lord did you create me: why do you love me so much, I who am less than a speck in your magnificent creation, yet you know every hair on my head. If I can love my family so much, how much greater is God's love for each one of us. If God is love then he surely cannot stop loving us no matter what we do. I cannot believe that he is a vengeful god who punishes us for our misdeeds. When we sin, we punish ourselves by separating ourselves from God's love. When we sin, we raise a barrier between ourselves and God making our souls a no-go area for God and shutting out the many blessings that God wants to shower on us. Often one sin leads to another and with each sin the barricade gets higher. The higher the barricade the more open we are to other influences. The longer the barricade is in place the harder it is to tear down. Only we ourselves can remove the barriers by turning to God in true humility and asking his forgiveness. Like the prodigal's father, God will run to us with open arms. The graces we have denied ourselves will come flooding through to us once more. For God is a gentle god. He does not force us to obey his commands or follow his

laws but coaxes us to walk with him. He holds our hands and leads us as we do with our own children.

*O Heavenly Father, when we want to go our own way,  
Gently guide us along the right path.  
When we think we know best,  
Gently steer us in the right direction.  
Help us to be like little children,  
And put all our trust in you.*

*I am certain of this: neither death nor life, no angel, no prince, nothing that exists, nothing still to come, not any power, or height or depth, nor any created thing, can come between us and the love of God visible in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Romans 8: 38-39

*Lord you are love itself: grant that we may love you.*



## PEACE

*Peace I leave with you, my peace I give you.*

Outside it was still dark. Normally by this time the sun would have brightened the sky but today the sky was lined with heavy, black, sombre clouds which prevented the light of the sun from penetrating the gloom. The wind raged and howled through the trees around the church, causing the windows and doors to rattle and creek. Here inside all was calm. Only the sanctuary was illuminated, the rest of the church was in semi-darkness. On the altar, a candle burned on either side of the monstrance. I was alone with the Blessed Sacrament. No-one else had yet arrived. As I sat gazing at the sacrament, I felt at peace, safe, sheltered. I had nothing to say, nor did Jesus say anything to me. There was no need for words, my presence there was my prayer and I knew that he was there. That was enough for me, I was not afraid.

Twenty minutes have passed which seemed like only two minutes and now I have suddenly become aware that others are with me in church and it is time for me to switch on all the lights. Soon we will begin morning prayers and then celebrate mass and receive Holy Communion.

People have told me I must be mad getting up so early when I don't have to, especially on days like this. "You're retired now, you should take it easy. Have a lie in" they tell me. "Enjoy your well earned retirement". They do not understand what peace, what calm it brings me. Just to sit in the presence of the lord.

On my way here, I passed young people struggling against the wind on their way to school, coats and scarves pulled tight around them, worrying about exams, grades, if they will get a place at the uni of their choice. I passed men and women on their way to work, worrying if they will get there in time, what jobs they will have to do today, if their efforts will ever be appreciated. How blessed I am to have left all that behind. If only those people had the time and inclination to stop and spend five minutes in here with the lord, I'm sure their anxieties would be eased. They would be much more ready to face the day ahead.

*My Lord Jesus Christ, who for the love which you bear for all of us, remain night and day in this Sacrament, full of compassion and love, awaiting, calling, welcoming all who come to visit you. I believe that you are present in the sacrament of the altar. I adore you from the depth of my nothingness, and I thank you for all the graces you have bestowed upon me, especially , for having given me yourself in this Blessed Sacrament, for having given me your most holy Mother Mary as my advocate and for having called me to visit you in this church.*

*My Jesus, I love you with my whole heart.*





## PERFECT JOY

St. Francis tells us that if we have all the virtues, graces and gifts that God can give us, we still cannot find perfect joy in them. *“We cannot glory in all those gifts of God, as they are not ours but God’s, as the apostle says: ‘what have you that you have not received’. But we can glory in the cross of tribulations and afflictions because that is ours, and so the apostle says: ‘I will not glory save in the cross of our lord Jesus Christ’”.*

As I sit alone in this beautiful church where I have worshipped for over forty years, I realise how much I love it. The mass is over, the altar has been cleared, the Rosary has been said, candles have been lit on the lady altar and prayers and petitions have been offered up to Our Lady. Everybody has now gone home except me. I have stayed behind for a moment to reflect. This is not a large church nor is it as ornate as many of the other churches I have visited are, but its simplicity is part of its loveliness. Also, its ambience makes it easier to feel closer to God. For over 170 years good people have worshipped here and it is as if their prayers have been absorbed into the walls. As the church cools, the benches begin to creak as if those good people are still here offering praise to God.

Yesterday we celebrated the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica of the Most Holy Redeemer and I am reminded of a phrase from the Gospel of St. John - “zeal for you house will devour me”. As I gaze at the tabernacle, it occurs to me that there are many churches throughout the world, all shapes and sizes, and in each one there is a sanctuary and in that holy place there is a tabernacle and nearby there is a red light burning to tell us that the body of Christ is inside. I think of St. Paul’s letter which tells us that we who believe in Jesus Christ are the church and that we each are temples. Our bodies are tabernacles in which the spirit of Jesus is present, waiting, calling, welcoming, whenever we care to visit. Alas, so often do I forget that he is there, deep within me, and it is only when I am in need that I call to him for help.

I remember when I first became a Eucharistic Minister how my zeal burned within me, consuming me. Now the flame still burns within but my body cannot respond as it did then. However, with age comes experience and wisdom. I know some young people who are burning with zeal and I understand their frustration. If I can, I will try to pass on the little wisdom I have gained and teach them that although Jesus came to set the world aflame, we must learn to control the fire within us.

We have seen too often in the recent past how overzealousness can lead to violence and war. We must temper our zeal with humility, love and tolerance. We must reserve righteous anger for those who deliberately and actively try to debase God's house. We must remember that we all follow different paths to God and sometimes those paths cross. When I meet another on that crossroad, I may think that he is following the wrong path, but who am I to judge? He may well be following a path that the Holy Spirit has mapped out especially for him. On the other hand, he may think that I am following the wrong path and because of his concern has spoken out in a way which to me seems hurtful because I am sure that I am carrying out God's will. Retaliation will not convert the other person but with patience, understanding and humility he may be persuaded that I may not be the bad person he thinks I am. I will turn to St Francis again for guidance.

*"If we endure all those insults and cruel rebuffs patiently, without being troubled and without complaining, and if we reflect humbly and charitably that that (person) really knows us and that God makes him speak against us, oh, Brother Leo, write that perfect joy is there!"*

From: **The little flowers of St Francis**, The "Fiorretti"



## FAMILIES

*“We do not have to forsake identity to live in harmony” Pope Francis-Sri Lanka*

My wife and I visit our supermarket in the village once or twice a week to pick up a few items we were unable to get or forgot to get in our weekly “big shop” Often, Betty asks me “who are all these women you keep speaking to?” I explain that they are all from church. Of course it is not just female members of the parish that I meet and say hello to. I think of the parish as my second family.

I was born into a large family, five sisters and two brothers, all of whom, except my sister Therese who became a nun, were married and had children of their own. Both our parents also came from large families, the Furlongs and the Toppings, so our extended families extended quite a way. We have cousins all over. A couple of years ago we had a Topping family reunion and met cousins that we had never met before but it was as if we had known them all our lives. I vaguely remember seeing a play many years ago that described the family as a kind of octopus from whose tentacles we never quite escape. Not that I would want to escape for I know how important the family is.

When a baby is born it is innocent and has no knowledge or experience of evil. I think that when that baby is born it is nearer to God than at any time in the child’s future life. We must cherish our children. We must be careful to teach them love and tolerance. The child will learn so much from his/her parents and family in the first few years, but we must be careful for they will learn as much from how we are as from what we say. I have come to realise that when we, the grown-ups are talking among ourselves, our two year old great-granddaughter, even though she seems to be absorbed in something else and not listening to us, hears every word we say and often repeats it later. When we bring our children to mass, they may not understand what is happening but they are absorbing everything, the atmosphere, the way we say our prayers, the way we approach the Eucharist, the way we treat our neighbour. When they are brought forward for Holy Communion they too want to receive the Blessed Sacrament. What they learn in the first few years will stay with them throughout their lives. If we are to change the world we must start with our children. We are their role-models.

If we are to spread the word we must be prepared to live the word but we must always be on our guard for there are others watching us and looking for a chance to criticise and accuse us of not practising what we preach.

### Conversion

takes time. When St. Paul experienced his “road to Damascus” event, I do not think that his experience was the beginning of his conversion but the climax. He had stood and witnessed the execution of St. Stephen. He could only have been impressed by the way Stephen had died. He must have witnessed other such happenings, all of which must have made him question what he himself was doing. When the event on the road happened, Paul immediately understood what God was asking of him.

The human race is a family. We are all God’s children. He loves each one of us equally. We have no right to think that we are better loved than any other? Most religions believe in God. They may have different names for him and different images of him but usually he is seen as a benevolent, omnipotent, spiritual being. We must not fight with one another over who worships the true God for he is the same God. We must respect each other’s beliefs and traditions. Some commit heinous crimes in the name of God. We must never use God as an excuse to use violence. We must try to teach those who do not know God but we must use persuasion and example, not force. We must preach, not with just words, but with everything we do.

O Lord, teach us to be kind and gentle and eloquent when we are telling of you.

*Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may be innocent and pure, as God’s perfect children who live in a world of corrupt and sinful people. You must shine among them like stars lighting up the sky.*

*Phil 2:14-15*

## **SIGN OF THE TIMES**

In St. Luke's gospel (12:54-59), Jesus rebukes the crowds for not knowing how to read the signs of the times. They could check the skies and the wind direction and know what weather to expect but although they were familiar with the scriptures they did not know how to interpret them. They knew about God but did not know God because they were so inward looking and concerned about their own mundane problems.

Humility is perhaps the greatest virtue. Without humility we cannot have faith. Without humility and faith we cannot begin to know God. Without humility we cannot know ourselves, we cannot come to know our place in God's wonderful creation; we cannot be truly sympathetic to our neighbour's needs. We need humility to be able to accept and appreciate the gifts that are put before us day after day. If I have no humility, I will be easily offended by criticism from others because I will not be able to accept that I may be wrong and that the criticism may be justified. Humility will enable me to understand their reasons for pointing out to me what they believe to be wrong and lead us towards reconciliation.

Two of my favourite saints are St. Francis of Assisi and St. Anthony of Padua. These were men who, because of their closeness to God, when praying, entered such a state of ecstasy that natural laws of gravity and location no longer applied. St. Francis, when praying, is said to have been elevated both spiritually and physically. St. Anthony is said to have had the gift of bi-location and been seen in two places at one time. To someone who does not believe in God, these stories may seem like fantasies similar to the increasing number of fantasy films now being produced, but to a believer they are evidence of the closeness of these holy men to God. Both men came from wealthy families and gave up everything in answer to Jesus' call to "follow me". If I can learn to be humble like them and follow their example, I will realise that because I don't need a big house, I don't want a big house and therefore am not disappointed that I don't have a big house; if I don't need or want a big car, then I won't be envious of my brother's big car. If I realise that I have more than my neighbour and that he is struggling to live on what he has, I will want to share what I have with him. It is well to reward those who work hard but we must also care for and share with those who are unable to work hard.

I think that we must all learn to read the signs of our time. When I was young, we bought goods that would last. Today we live in a throwaway society, consumerism has taken over. Goods that are produced today have a built-in obsolescence. What is sold over the counter today will be out of date tomorrow. On the one hand we are encouraged to save for old age but on the other we are encouraged to spend money on products we should have because “we are worth it” while throughout the world people are dying of starvation. Consumerism leads to materialism which makes us concentrate on our physical desires and put aside our spiritual needs. We become self-centred and arrogant. As we turn away from God we become restless and are never satisfied because the more we have the more we want. Material things can never satisfy for deep within us is a longing for God. He alone can give us all that we need.

*O Lord, help us to know that there is only one God.*

*That you are not on my side or his side but on our side,*

*And that you love each and every one of us,*

*Rich or poor,*

*Young or old,*

*Black or white,*

*Muslim or Christian,*

*Saint or sinner,*

*Help us to celebrate our differences, not resent them,*

*And help us to be mindful of each others needs.*

## HOW MANY TIMES, LORD?

*Israel, come back to the Lord your God;  
Your iniquity was the cause of your downfall.*

Hosea 14:2

The scribes and the Pharisees were not happy with Jesus. They could not understand why he preferred to associate with the riff-raff, the publicans, the prostitutes and the tax collectors; the Godless and the criminals. Yet Jesus criticised them, the scribes and Pharisees and called them hypocrites. They who had studied the scriptures and had always observed the laws of Moses: They who prayed each day in the temple and thanked God that they were such upright citizens and not like these people that Jesus dined with: They who fasted and gave alms to the poor. Why did Jesus treat them with such contempt? Of course, Jesus knew what they were thinking and told them a story of a prodigal son.

There are three main characters in the story. The father who is loving and giving and only wants what is best for his children, I think that he represents God, our heavenly father, who only wants to love us and be loved by us; who allows us the freedom to make our own choices but is always ready to forgive and forget when we admit making a wrong choice and are ready to atone.

I think the younger son represents Israel. How often had Israel's arrogance caused it to break the covenant with God? How often had the chosen people turned away from their God and chosen a life of debauchery? How many times had their sins caused them misery and despair? How many messengers had God sent to warn them of the consequences of their wrongdoing? Time after time God had relented in his anger and led them back to the fold, rejoicing and showering them with blessings. So it was with the younger son. The father was so pleased to have his son back he declared a celebration and a feast.

I think the older son represents the scribes and Pharisees. They had studied the scriptures but did not understand them. They had interpreted them to suit their own way of living. They followed the laws of Moses to the letter but not in spirit. They talked about God but did not know God. They so loved themselves and were so absorbed in their own self-righteousness that they knew neither how to love God nor appreciate all that God had given them. They condemned others but failed to recognise their own sinfulness.

O Lord, I am like the older son and the scribes and Pharisees. How many times have I resented those who have been preferred to me? How many times have I been envious of others who have received recognition and acclaim for their good deeds? How many times have I looked down on my neighbour and felt that I was more righteous? How many times have I condemned the drinker, the drug-taker, the prostitute, the fornicator and not considered what great sadness in their lives has brought them to that way of life? How many times have I taken you for granted and misused the gifts you gave me? How many times have I seen you hurt and in need and not reached out to comfort you? How many times have I seen you alone and friendless and have not spoken a word to cheer you? How many times have I seen you hungry and not given you anything to eat? How many times have I left it to others to do what needs to be done?

SO MANY TIMES, LORD, SO MANY TIMES! FORGIVE ME.



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All reflections available at:  
[www.stwinefridesneston.org.uk/resources.html](http://www.stwinefridesneston.org.uk/resources.html)