

I know we are all here to pray for Harry but I have had a word with him and he is happy for you all to pray for me over the next few minutes and if I get through unscathed it will be his first miracle!

Monsignor Canon Henry Michael Doyle to most of us Father Harry or simply Harry has been a loving presence in Plymouth Diocese for over 55 years. He was blessed with the sunniest of dispositions which radiated warmth and welcome.

I have known Harry since I was at school but we became good friends when I was at Exeter University and through summer camps. The Sacred Heart and the White Hart featured prominently in my education. He has been a constant support throughout my working life.

My generation owes much to those priests and sisters who came over from Ireland to serve here. When Father Harry came to England, one of the class of 68 who include Fathers Toffollo, Perkins, Chrystal and Nannery there was a big cultural difference between the two countries. It must have been quite a challenge. I want to thank his family for sharing him with us.

Harry often spoke of the great debt, spiritually and financially, that he owed to his parents and his siblings, Maureen and Tom for the sacrifices they made. This meant he could go to boarding school which he enjoyed and then, in 1962 to St. Patrick's seminary in Carlow which he absolutely loved. He was known there as Harry the Hammer because of his practical talents, an example of which is the sanctuary lamp at Topsham which was a real labour of love. At seminary he was the man backstage for drama productions and the projectionist in the days before TV. He was always happiest behind the scenes. He was very faithful to reunions and to his classmates.

He knew that his faith was nurtured in his family and was hugely grateful for that. It was such a natural faith. He used his Irish heritage in many of his homilies.

He spoke warmly of his nephews and nieces Kathleen, John Joe, Gertrude, Oliver and Patrick. He enjoyed being part of the extended family and doing weddings and baptisms. It was a great sorrow to him that he could not get back for your mother's funeral.

Harry always told me that we shouldn't deify people at funerals so let's start with some of his faults and failings. He smoked far too much, he stayed up much too late, his language could be a little colourful. In over 50 years I received two postcards: they both said, 'To Fiona love Harry' and one of them didn't have a stamp!

He said that homilies and eulogies should not be too long and coined a phrase which I won't repeat here but it hit the mark! I'm not here to tell stories. I hope you will do that with the family and each other. I just want to talk about the man and the priest he said he wanted to be.

There were firm beliefs underpinning the way Harry did his job. He believed strongly that when he left Ireland he had joined a new family which was the Diocese of Plymouth: a decision he never regretted. He was a great supporter of his brother priests. This was how he approached his role as Episcopal Vicar for Finance. He served for many years as a very 'hands on' and kind, school governor although I understand he could ask some quite frightening questions!

He also believed that while he served in a parish, his parishioners were his family. I know from reading many tributes and from talking to people how often the phrase 'our dear, Father Harry' is used; so you also felt he belonged to you. He would like that and I am sure he knew it. I want to thank you all for praying for him and visiting him both at Topsham and especially when he was in residential care. Ultimately he could only live in the moment but I am convinced that although he might not remember we had visited, he enjoyed our company while we were there. You will also know that he would say he was happy and not to worry. For the most part he put up with his decline with patience and humility.

He talked often of the joy of the priesthood and it wasn't a glib expression for him. He **absolutely loved** being a priest. He loved all his parishes and spoke warmly of his parishioners. He did say however, that when in 1990 Bishop Christopher appointed him to the Sacred Heart, he felt like he had come home, so it is good he is here today. He was always amazed at how much people would do for their parish and this generosity sustained him. His good friend, John Cunningham said that Harry wore his priesthood like a comfortable old jacket, which sums it up. I think it was because priesthood brought him into contact with so many people. And Harry **loved** people. His memory for names was legendary. This memory was jogged by the fact that he was genuinely interested in our stories. It was particularly cruel that he developed Alzheimer's which robbed him of memory but even as he lost names he would often find a detail about a person to identify them.

Harry met and shared Christ through his love of people. There were no boundaries for him. He did his best to welcome everyone into church whatever their situation, their faith or lack of it. I have opened the door to many waifs and strays at Topsham looking for Harry. He served as chaplain to the Lord Mayor of Exeter and to the prison and was equally at home in both settings. He enjoyed many ecumenical friendships too. I have asked him for his gift of wide acceptance.

He would stand outside church, ciggie in hand, waiting for people to arrive before mass just in case someone wanted to have a word. He loved to chat, as anyone who was in a hurry or who came to do a job in the house will know and some of his stories were very long!!

He knew what he could do. He understood his limitations. If others would do a job better he was happy for them to do it. He was good at spotting talent that could be used in the parish. He saw that as his role. Many of you will have felt the dreaded hand on the shoulder and found yourselves doing jobs for over 20 years. One of his proud moments was enabling the International mass here at the Sacred Heart and although he didn't have a note in his head he threw himself into raising funds for a new organ at Topsham! He was a huge supporter over the years of my ministry with young people.

He had no interest in organising his own funeral and was happy to delegate that as well. When I broached it a few years ago he just tapped me on the arm and said 'it will be alright' ..don't worry.'

I want to thank the parishioners of Topsham with whom he formed a real bond, for their compassion and understanding in supporting Harry to say mass for as long as he was able and for helping me support him. His Alzheimers was full blown and very public but he retained a strong desire to serve and you helped him.

We will all have our own special memories. I have many including the sheer exuberance of his sprinkling of holy water and the joy if he got you!

Father Harry will be buried in Ireland alongside his parents and within touching distance of his good friend Father Matt McGauran.

Father Harry was first and foremost a warm human being who brought that warmth to his priesthood and shared it with us all over the years. He didn't complicate his ministry. He simply tried to be kind. You invariably felt better for having spent time with him. He was generous, compassionate and full of fun.

This parish has, in its time, experienced sudden and tragic deaths. Father Harry's death is neither. All funerals should be hopeful but this one should also be happy. This occasion should be full of grateful smiles like Harry's. Firm in faith, he thoroughly enjoyed this life and I have no doubt he will thoroughly enjoy the next one.

Thank you Harry. Rest in peace. Pray for us.