

Eulogy for Canon Giles Goward

I feel deeply honoured and privileged to have been asked to give this eulogy for Fr. Giles.

I think the number of parishioners who have turned out tonight for this Mass, who are with us in spirit if they are at home shielding or tending to their family or watched the Requiem Mass on Monday, truly demonstrates and reflects the love and affection we and our families all had for our former parish priest who we remember so fondly. I think we will all have drawn strength and comfort from our Mass this evening. Thank you Fr. Patrick.

Fr. Giles was born in Clayton West which is a small village between Huddersfield and Wakefield in West Yorkshire. He was a very proud, Yorkshireman and I of course truly understand why. Along with Fr. Giles and the great Peter Lennon we had our own "God's own country" appreciation society.

He was the third of four children to Clifford and Ruby. Penny and Peter his older sister and brother and Paul his younger brother. He was particularly close to Penny who was about 10 years older than him and they formed a very close bond which continued throughout his life. The family were proud Anglican Christians, but life was very ordinary in many ways, with a very loving home and a very happy childhood with many friends locally and in school.

It was clear from an early age that Fr. Giles was highly intelligent, a voracious reader, with an outstanding memory for detail. He was also a choir boy for a time in Wakefield Cathedral. He left school and studied Biology at Durham University.

After graduating, he really started to discern if he had a vocation. He went to an assessment weekend of reviews and interviews with Anglican clergy and a couple of bishops. At the end of the weekend, he was told that the result of his assessment was "not suitable" for ordained ministry. He was obviously disappointed and resolved to stick at it. Sometime after and being very persistent, he was accepted to study for Anglican ministry at the Theological College of the Resurrection in Mirfield not far from his family home. Whilst studying at Mirfield he felt a strong calling to Rome and discussed this with his Pastoral Director who was sympathetic, but advised him to complete his

Anglican ministry, he was ordained and was appointed to a parish in Tipton near Dudley in the West Midlands.

Giles and some friends, Richard Dinniss and Philip Harrop who were also Anglican clergy were making a similar faith journey to Rome and they agreed that Giles should go speak with the then Archbishop of Birmingham Maurice Couve de Murville to discuss becoming Catholics and more importantly Catholic Priests. They were accepted with warmth and gratitude and they entered Oscott College in Birmingham and after completing their studies Fr. Giles and Fr. Dinniss were ordained on the 14th July 1995 in St. Chad's Cathedral. Fr Philip some 6 months after that. Very interestingly Fr. Brian Whatmore, who was the Anglican priest at Tipton also found his way to Rome and is also now a Catholic priest of the Archdiocese.

Fr. Giles then spent a year as curate at Holy Trinity in Newcastle under Lyme. After about a year, he became the Archbishop's secretary from 1996 to 2000 and in the latter part of his time as secretary, he helped manage the transition of the new Archbishop Vincent Nicholls after Archbishop Maurice retired.

He was then appointed Parish Priest at Our Lady Queen of Peace in Worcester from 2000 -2005. He embarked on an MA in Victorian Literature whilst in Worcester.

He arrived here as Parish Priest in late September 2005 and was formally inducted into the parish on a December night and the church was packed to the rafters. I think we all realised at his induction Mass just how popular and lucky we were to have Fr. Giles as our new pastor because over 60 parishioners from Worcester made the journey to Caversham and spoke very movingly about Fr. Giles and the impact he had made on the parish and on the lives of individual parishioners during his five year ministry there.

What was it about him that made him so special?

There is not enough time tonight to mention all his skills and qualities. He was a natural people person, always most comfortable around people either individually or in groups. He was always interested in the person he was talking to. He wanted to know individuals and their families, getting to know parents, grandparents, children, grandchildren. He was a great listener, he had empathy and always had a great way to say something that was profound and often comforting. He had what I call the "common touch" no matter where

you lived or where you were from or whatever your circumstances or whatever your problem, he was always there and available. He never judged. He could move from highly intellectual and sophisticated discussions and conversations to talking about football or some other topic in a heartbeat and give you full attention. He was the best person to have on any quiz.

He had a fantastic sense of humour and could enter conversations and get people laughing in no time. He had a wonderful ability to defuse situations with his sense of humour, or making light of a situation or making you laugh. It was a very disarming way of easing a tension or handling a difficult moment.

He was a real socialite and von viveur. He loved nothing more than meeting people socially in their homes and getting to know you over the dinner table or over a coffee or even a glass of wine. He loved bringing people together and introduced the Lenten House Masses on the Fridays of Lent. He loved to go out and over time was very happy to go out with parishioners for a meal or even a pint or two. The "choir boys" nights out became legendary.

He also was generous with his time and would always accommodate requests for his help or for his ministry. I remember having a family gathering for 60 or so of 4 generations and I asked him if we would come and bless the event. It was an instant yes and he mingled with ease with so many in the family who all remember him so fondly. He attended Silver and Golden Wedding events. I know many others can recount such a story. He was generous in sharing his own family. Many of us got to know Giles' Mum and Dad and his sister and brother in law, Penny and Rod over a number of years, often over a meal or a drink or two!! Fr. Giles invited the parish to an open home in the presbytery for his father's 90th birthday. He was very hospitable.

He was generous in his support and organisation of parish events and wider connections. People will remember the pilgrimages to Lourdes. The pilgrimage to the Northern saints in 2011 where we stayed in the halls and ate in the refectory of Durham University, and the parish attendance at the Papal Mass with Pope Benedict in September 2010. Fr Giles was asked to be an MC with Fr. Philip at this Mass, they were very proud to have a personal audience with His Holiness. We cannot forget the connection he established between the parish and the work with Fr. Barnaby with the "street kids" left orphaned, abused and in extreme poverty in Mumbai, India.

He was instrumental in the social side of the parish and inspired Mike Ryan to develop what is now the Rock and Ale festival (now in its ninth year) springing from a tribute and fundraiser for Angela Fung and the MNDA. He also introduced the 200 Club for fundraising.

He was a massive champion of St Anne's school, as Parish Priest, but also as a Governor. He was a huge support to the then Head, Kait Nash, as well as to pupils, teachers and parents alike. He was a real advocate for maintaining the Catholic ethos and standards in the school. He cherished and worked actively with all the ministries in the parish too, the Choir and Music group, the readers, the servers, the SVP, the Finance Committee, the social groups. Moreover, he truly appreciated all that the parish family gave to ministry in the Church, however large or small that contribution.

He was a truly fantastic pastor, children loved him, he was able to draw out his own "inner child" in the way he communicated with children on and at their level. He could switch quickly back to a lesson for parents and teachers, whilst not losing the connection with the children.

His pastoral ministry over 8 years in Caversham was marked with wonderful liturgies. He baptised many, received several into the Church, he married several parishioners, 100s of First Confessions and Communions, administered the sacraments to the dying and laid to rest many as well. Always a support to proud and enthusiastic families, but also huge comfort to the bereaved and grief stricken.

In what little spare time he had he was able to complete his MA in Victorian Literature.

We were all shocked in 2013 when Fr Giles was asked by + Archbishop Bernard to take up a new appointment as Pastoral Director, Formation Tutor and Director of the Permanent Diaconate Programme at Oscott College in Birmingham, a post he held until June 2020 when Archbishop Bernard appointed him Rector. He also bestowed on him title of Canon. This all coincided with the celebration of his Silver Jubilee of Ordination on July 15th 2020. When asked by his PA about changing the Oscott stationery to reflect his appointment as Canon so soon after his appointment as Rector he exclaimed I'm from Yorkshire what do you think? He was very humble and never hung up on titles or public recognition, however he was extremely proud and in his own words... "chuffed"

He was loved by the seminarians, the teaching staff and all who lived and worked within the Oscott community. The seminary has lost a fabulous Rector, the clergy have lost a fabulous brother priest and we as the lay faithful of the Church have lost a fabulous pastor and the Goward family have lost a wonderful brother and uncle. We have all lost a true and great friend.

On his many visits to Caversham after he left the parish he would always visit parishioners. Kath Turner his loyal and faithful housekeeper was a great example of someone he loved to visit, as was Mary van den Bergh and her sister Agnes.

His final weeks were very difficult for him following a sudden stroke, especially going into hospital during this pandemic. He faced many trials and many hours on his own with no visits from family or friends. In conversations on the phone, he never lost his cheerfulness or sense of humour, he said you need a sense of humour with the menu in this hospital. He was as always more interested to talk and enquire about others. He was given very good pastoral and spiritual support by the Catholic Chaplain and had Mass and sacraments on occasion.

Having returned to his flat at Oscott and surrounded by close family, friends and the Oscott community, he passed away peacefully in the afternoon of January 28th

As we all mourn and come to terms with the loss of a great pastor and to many of us a real friend, we can surely take comfort from Jesus' words in the Parable of the Talents Matthew Chapter 25 verse 23.

“Well done good and faithful servant, you were faithful in small things, I put you in charge of many things. Come and share your Masters happiness.”

We now have a good friend and another advocate for us in heaven, who will continue to pray for us and for the parish family, as he did during his earthly life.

Requiescat in Pace Canon Giles.

This eulogy was given by Damian Colehan at the Memorial Mass for Canon Giles Goward RIP in the church of Our Lady and St. Anne Caversham on Wednesday 10th February 2021. Celebrant Mgr. Patrick H Daly