

## Homily Preached at Funeral Mass of Fr John Quinn

Glenfarne 16 March 2020

*I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done.*

John Donne, the English poet and priest, was born in the year 1572 and died in 1631. His poetry was good and much of it has survived. A sermon about death, which he preached in the year 1623, has also survived and phrases from that sermon are still used today almost 400 years later. Ernest Hemingway borrowed the title of his book *For whom the bell tolls* from that sermon. 'No man is an island' is another well-worn phrase first used by Donne in that homily as he tried to persuade his hearers that all human beings are linked to one another, that all share in a common humanity. He then went on to say 'any man's death diminishes me'. And it does.

Whenever someone we know dies, a bit of us dies with them. The truth of this statement is very obvious today as we gather for the funeral Mass of Fr John Quinn. His death is a death in the family, not just for his own immediate and extended family, but also for this parish of Glenfarne and for his many friends in other places who got to know and love him over the years. Today we all know in a very real way the truth of that statement that 'any man's death diminishes me'. The reality is that a great priest and a good man has died and we are all the poorer for his passing.

John Quinn was born just over eighty two years ago, on 20 February 1938. He was one of nine children born to Michael and Bridget Quinn in the townland of Drumcoura in the parish of Drumreilly in County Leitrim. He went to Kilmore and Gortahose National Schools in Drumreilly before entering St Patrick's College, Cavan in September 1952. Among those who went with him into St Patrick's College in early September 1952 were Cardinal Seán Brady and Fr Thomas Woods, both of whom are here in the sanctuary today. Others who were in that class or else joined it a year or two later were Cyril Mulligan and John O'Donnell who also became priests for the diocese of Kilmore. Today, as we pray for John Quinn, we remember too his deceased Kilmore classmates Cyril Mulligan and John O'Donnell. May they have a happy reunion in heaven.

That class which did the Leaving Certificate in St Patrick's College in Cavan in 1957 was an extraordinary one because not only did five of them become diocesan priests but a further seven of the class were ordained as missionary priests. Now that we are living in a time when vocations are as scarce as the corncrake we must never stop hoping, never stop praying that we will have more vocations to the priesthood and the religious life. The harvest is still great and the labourers are getting fewer, so let us pray that the Lord of the harvest will send labourers into the harvest.

John Quinn was ordained a priest along with John O'Donnell, Cyril Mulligan, Thomas Woods and Colm Woods in the Cathedral in Cavan on 21 June 1964 by Bishop Austin Quinn. And the following Saturday, *The Anglo Celt* published a photograph of them all outside the cathedral. But in doing so it made a grave error in saying that John Quinn was from Ballinamore! Those of us who know that country well know how important accuracy is in these territorial matters. So we must be precise. He was a proud Drumcoura man, a proud Drumreilly man and a proud Leitrim man through and through and he remained so all his life. He spent the first nine years of his life ministering in County Leitrim in Ballintrillick and Kiltyclogher and by a strange coincidence he also spent the last nine years of his life ministering in Leitrim here in the parish of Glenfarne. In between those two nine-year spells in Leitrim he worked in County Cavan in the parishes of Kill, Bailieborough, Knockbride and Mullagh. John Quinn remained ever loyal to his native place, but the truth is that he was committed to and loyal to every parish he ministered in. He immersed himself in the life of every parish he was in and he put the rest of us to shame by his commitment, zeal and hard work. It is little wonder that the people of Glenfarne are grieving today as if one of their own family had died.

The people of Glenfarne had planned to present a plaque to Fr John in appreciation of his devoted service to their parish. Because of his illness they did not get to do so. And so it was appropriate that this plaque was brought up as one of the symbols at the beginning of the Mass. The plaque, which includes photographs of the two Glenfarne churches, St Mary's and St Michael's, reads:

YOU HAVE FOLLOWED THE COMMAND OF THE FATHER AND HAVE BEEN FAITHFUL TO YOUR CONGREGATION. YOU HAVE BEEN A LEADER AND A TEACHER, A COUNSELLOR AND A FRIEND. YOU HAVE STOOD UP FOR WHAT YOU BELIEVED IN AND BROUGHT HOPE AND STRENGTH TO THE FLOCK YOU WERE CHARGED WITH. THANK YOU FR QUINN FOR YOUR DEDICATION AND COMMITMENT TO THE TEACHING OF CHRIST. YOU ARE TRULY APPRECIATED AND LOVED.

John Quinn had learned to serve others by modelling his life on that of Jesus Christ. In the gospel reading for our funeral Mass, which is taken from John Chapter 13, Jesus is trying to get the message across to his disciples, that we must be both humble and unstinting in serving other people in acts of kindness, care and love. And Jesus, being a good teacher and knowing that actions speak louder than words, got down on his knees and began to wash his disciple's feet. And when he was finished he said: *I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done.* And that is exactly what John Quinn has done throughout his fifty six years of priesthood. He has copied what Jesus Christ has done.

St Peter was gabby and argumentative and when Jesus announced that he was going to wash his feet, Peter protested loudly '*Never, You shall never wash my feet!*' But Jesus persuaded him otherwise, bringing him around so well that Peter said, then Lord *you may wash not only my feet, but my hands and my head as well!* As all of us know, John Quinn, was like Peter, being both gabby and argumentative! But like Peter, once he committed there was no turning back, no half measures. Today, on his funeral day, we thank God for all the good John did and for all the service he gave throughout his fifty six years of priesthood.

John Quinn dedicated his life to caring for others and in turn he was blessed in having others to care for him. He was blessed in his family and he was also blessed in his long-serving and faithful housekeeper Tilly Cassidy, who took care of him for fifty five years. Today we thank you Tilly for being so good to him over the years and we pray that God and Mary will comfort you in your sorrow. Many others were good to him too, both here in Glenfarne and in every parish that he ministered in, and we thank them all for that. During the last couple years, when John's health began to fail, he was blessed with carers too. All the nieces and nephews and extended family were good to him and I know that they will not mind me singling out his niece-in-law, Theresa Quinn, for special mention. Theresa, you hung in with Fr John every step of the way and we thank you most sincerely for doing that. We thank too the nurses, doctors and staff of Sligo General Hospital and College View Nursing Home in Cavan. In these uncertain times we thank God for nurses, doctors and carers everywhere who are in the frontline in combating the coronavirus. We ask you Lord to give success to the work of their hands.

I mentioned that John Quinn was gabby and argumentative, and he was. But he was also great company and very good humoured. Conversations with John were never dull. Both he and I were born in what was the medieval parish of Drumreilly in County Leitrim, and he never lost an opportunity to remind me that he came from Upper Drumreilly and that I came from Lower Drumreilly! About twelve days ago, when I visited him in College View Nursing Home, he was sitting out in the chair and it was obvious that he was getting back to his old self. I was barely in the door when he asked me to name five of the top eight contenders for the position of new archbishop of Dublin. When I only managed to name three of them he scolded me telling me that a man in my position should be better informed about these things! We will all miss him now.

Today we pray for all who are grieving for John. We pray especially for his brother Joe, his sisters Theresa Frazer and Sr Mary Loyola, his sisters in law Mary Devine Quinn, Mary O'Mahoney Quinn and Joan Quinn, his brother in law Pat Murphy, his housekeeper Tilly Cassidy, his nieces and nephews, grandnieces and nephews and all his extended family, his brother priests, the people of this parish and his many friends. Many of those who are grieving for him would dearly love to be here today but because of restrictions cannot do so. Please God, in a few months time, when this crisis has eased, there will be an opportunity for the people of Glenfarne and others to gather to give thanks to God for the life of this good man.

In praying for John we pray too for his deceased parents Michael and Bridget Quinn, his brothers Bernard, James and Peter, his sisters Sr Eileen and Kathleen Murphy, and all his extended family and brother priests who have died. May they all be blessed with peace and joy in heaven. But above all, on this day, we pray for Fr John Quinn, thanking God for his life and praying that he will now join God and all the saints in heaven. May he rest in peace.

*I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done.*

