

Homily at Funeral Mass of Canon P.J. Corrigan Belturbet 26 August 2020

Unless a wheat grain falls on the ground and dies it remains only a single grain, but if it dies it yields a rich harvest.

The Welsh poet W.H. Davies wrote a lovely poem called *The Kingfisher*. It is a poem about that beautiful and shy bird that lives in quiet places, by the water's edge, away from the fuss and noise of life. In this poem Davies contrasts the quiet and private kingfisher with that other bird, the proud peacock, that struts around showing off its colourful plumage in the most public of places. Davies himself was a shy, retiring man, more like the kingfisher than the peacock. He wrote in the poem of the kingfisher and of himself:

Nay, lovely bird, thou art not vain,
Thou hast no proud, ambitious mind.
I also love a quiet place
That's green, away from all mankind.

Just in the last week, a few days before Canon P.J. died, his nephew Padraig Donohoe shared with him the news that he had been out on the water that day. Canon P.J.'s first question was: Did you see a kingfisher? And he had and told him so. P.J., a great observer and lover of nature, was cheered by this news. He too, like the poet W.H. Davies shared some of the characteristics of the kingfisher. P.J. loved people but he, like Davies the poet, could truly say:

I also love a quiet place
That's green, away from all mankind.

P.J. Corrigan was a man of great faith and so many times over the years his spirit was nourished and revived in the great outdoors by the wonderful varied and beautiful world we live in. P.J. knew the natural world intimately and shared his great knowledge of that world with others and in doing so brought people closer to God who created it all.

I first got to know P.J. Corrigan in the Autumn of 1969, when I went into St Patrick's College, Cavan as a fourth year student. P.J. was then a young curate living out the road in Killatain in the parish of Denn and each Friday he came into the College to give a talk to the students and to hear confessions. It must have been pure torture for him because on Friday evenings we were restless and giddy and couldn't wait to get outdoors after a long week of classes. Nine years later, after my ordination, we ended up in the same parish, he in Maudabawn and I in the Comprehensive school in Cootehill. He was always a private man but I, and everyone who knew him, had great respect for him, and the better we got to know him, the greater was our respect.

Canon P.J. was an extraordinary man, a deep thinker with wisdom picked up over the years. He had those great qualities of human kindness, respect and empathy for everyone of every age. He was in touch with all life, in touch with the natural world and with other human beings. He loved walking, hill walking and flat walking - though he never walked or lived in a selfish way. Instead he helped, in a quiet way, so many people who were struggling along the road of life.

The readings that P.J. chose for this his funeral Mass give an insight into what made him tick. He was the way he was because of his belief in the Lord Jesus Christ. He believed in Him to such an extent that he was willing to commit his life to the Lord in the priesthood. The

first Reading tells of the vocation, the call of Jeremiah the prophet. It begins: *Now the Word of the Lord came to me saying 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you and before you were born I consecrated you.* Jeremiah, and I am sure P.J. too, was unsure about answering that call because of a feeling of inadequacy. Jeremiah protested: *Ah Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak for I am only a child.* Both Jeremiah and P.J. were aware of their own inadequacies just as all of us human beings are. The second reading from Paul to the Corinthians captures this sense of unworthiness: *We are only the earthenware jars that hold this treasure, to make it clear that such an overwhelming power comes from God and not from us.* But the Lord reassured Jeremiah: *Do not say I am only a child for you shall go to all to whom I send you.'* And that is what P.J. Corrigan did too. He went to all that the Lord sent him to and he dedicated his life to caring for them.

The church of the future is going to be lay-led with fewer priests than we had in the past. This change will allow lay people in our parishes to discover their calling to come to a new understanding of their faith and to use their gifts for the good of the local church community. But we will need priests too - good men like P.J. to continue the good work that he did. Please God, in four week's time Thomas Small, a good friend of P.J.'s will be ordained a priest here in this church. In a sense Thomas will be taking up the baton that P.J. has carried for the past sixty four years. Today we pray that God will bless Thomas in his ministry and that others too will have the faith and generosity to dedicate their lives to the priesthood and religious life.

Back eight years ago, in June 2012, I went to the final day of the Eucharistic Congress in Croke Park and concelebrated the closing Mass there. Sitting beside me was Canon P.J. Corrigan! There were no half measures with him. He had gone to Dublin at the beginning of the week to take part in the whole week's proceedings. He had three carrier bags with him in Croke Park and had no lift home. I was delighted to be able to give him a lift back to Belturbet. I always marvelled at how, in recent years when he stopped driving, he could get from A to B to C and then back to A again! He had a wonderful network of friends who brought him wherever he needed to go. And he had mastered the art of sending cryptic texts messages to them. One text that I remember had just six letters: TKU PJC. Translated it read, 'Thank you. P.J. Corrigan!' P.J. had an impish and quirky sense of humour and a lovely smile to go with it. Today we thank God for all who were good to him over the years.

P.J. was a great gardener. He was a man who was close to nature and close to God who gives life and growth and creates all that is. It is an act of faith to plant a bulb and to have the patience to wait for months on end before it sprouts above the ground. The one who plants is co-operating with God in this miracle of growth and new life. And Jesus in trying to explain to his followers something of the mystery of life, death and new life, talked of the world of nature too. He said: *Unless a wheat grain falls on the ground and dies it remains only a single grain, but if it dies it yields a rich harvest.* The bulb and the seed must go into the ground and die before the new life and new growth can come. For us human beings too there must be death before there can be new life with God. Today we pray that this gentle and good man will rise to new life with God. May he rest in peace.