

Anniversary Mass celebrating the life of Monsignor Duffy

We have dedicated our beautiful Mass tonight to celebrate the life of Monsignor Anthony Canon Duffy, better known to most of us as Fr Tony or just Tony. It was with a great sense of loss that we heard of his untimely death a year ago today. It was a great sadness to Fr Tony's family that his Funeral Mass was held during the COVID restrictions and so many of you were unable to celebrate the life and work of this great man. I think this church would have been filled four times over by people whose own lives were touched and influenced by Fr Tony. His family are thrilled that we are all here tonight to celebrate his life and work. You only had to read the sentiments expressed in the many tributes to him to realise what an influential and spiritual priest he was. He didn't realise how special he was to so many and he would have been overwhelmed by the outpouring of grief from across the country and from Lourdes. People described him as a confidante and adviser; always there at a moment's notice to listen, to confide in, to offer support and advice; as a genuinely friendly man who wanted everyone to find a place in the Parish and on the Lourdes Pilgrimage; as someone who took you under his wing with a great sense of fun and spirituality. He knew how to hold your attention in his homilies (and they were never too long). He had a brilliant way of putting things across in a simple but intellectual way. How will we fill the void that he has left? It has been a privilege for us all to know him as Parish Priest, Lourdes Pilgrimage Director and friend.

A quiet, dedicated and unassuming priest, he worked diligently in the background for his Parish, the Lourdes Pilgrimage and the Archdiocese. He arrived at St Cuthbert's as a curate to Canon Davidson between 1973-1979. After several moves to other parishes in the Archdiocese he returned to his spiritual home - St Cuthbert's as parish priest in 1989, and adding Our Lady, Mother of the church,

Currie in 1998, where he dedicated his pastoral and priestly ministry to supporting all his parishioners, young and old. So many families are indebted to him for the care and compassion he gave to them in their time of crisis and trauma. He visited all the sick and housebound in the parish with Communion every 1st Friday of the month. He loved organising social events in the parish, especially the quiz nights, ceilidhs and dances. He revelled in the musical talent of his parishioners, from the Music group, who have enhanced our liturgy tonight, to many of you whom we will applaud later this evening. However, you wouldn't approach him first thing in the morning with any new ideas. You allowed him to mellow and let him think it was his idea. He was a notorious wind-up merchant, and caught out certain pass-keepers every week you know who you are! He particularly loved being in the company of the young people at St Cuthbert's and St Augustine's as school chaplain, where he got away with stealing chips from plates in the dining room. He supported many of our ski trips abroad. As a non-skier he was invaluable as our nurse and agony uncle. His own musical talents came into their own when he got his hands on the karaoke machine. There was no holding him back with his rendition of the Beatles hits. He was not just our parish priest and school chaplain, but he was our friend.

His great love of Lourdes, Our Lady & St Bernadette was palpable.

Fr Tony first went to Lourdes in 1966 as a senior scout with St Pat's Parish Scout Group. He loved helping and supporting those less fortunate than himself and vowed to return. His first pilgrimage with the Archdiocese was in 1973, the year he was ordained.

In 1975, Pope Paul VI proclaimed a Holy Year, with special indulgences granted for those who journeyed to Rome and Cardinal Gordon Joseph Gray suggested that there shouldn't be an Archdiocesan Pilgrimage to Lourdes that year. Undeterred, Fr Tony and some of us organised a mini 'Lourdes at Home', taking a group of sick and disabled people to St Andrew's Seminary Drygrange.

What fun we had. We celebrated Mass every day and even had a Torchlight Procession in the grounds. We played games, did our own catering (restrictions would not allow that today) and went on outings. I remember vividly Fr Tony helping to lift people onto a hay cart pulled by a tractor at John Cook's farm in the Borders. We drew a line about allowing him to drive the tractor.

In those early days, although we went to Lourdes as an Archdiocesan Pilgrimage, the Hospitalité was a dormant organisation. In 1978, with Fr Tony's support and encouragement the Edinburgh Lourdes Hospitalité, AKA The Helpers of Our Lady of Lourdes, was re-established and he became our 1st Chaplain, a role he held until he became the Pilgrimage Director in 1983.

Each year he attended the Conference of British Lourdes Pilgrimage Directors, among whom he was greatly respected for his friendship, wisdom, experience and support.

He went to Lourdes every year in February for the International Conference of Pilgrimages.

From 1986 to 1998 he was the chaplain to the newly formed Association of British Lourdes Pilgrimage Hospitalités (ABLPH), a forum for those British Pilgrimages involved in organising pilgrimages to Lourdes.

He supported many friends who wished to go to Lourdes on their final journey and was Chaplain to many Across Jumbulance Pilgrimages to Lourdes and Rome.

He was honoured to be in Lourdes in August 2004 when Pope John Paul 2nd visited on the 150th Anniversary of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception.

Fr Tony never missed an Archdiocesan Pilgrimage until COVID struck two years ago.

He fulfilled his role as Pilgrimage Director with compassion, commitment and good humour until his untimely death last year.

His commitment and service in promoting the message of Lourdes and the Shrine's pastoral life and outreach was recognised when he was appointed as an Honorary Chaplain to the Lourdes Grotto. When he received the Medal of Honour, the citation praised Fr Tony's many years of service as Pilgrimage Director for St Andrews & Edinburgh.

The distinctive Insignia medal is a cross with Marian symbols. When we close our Mass to night with the Sign of the Cross let us remember Fr Tony and his contribution to the success of our Pilgrimages through the years and the life of the parish.

While in Lourdes and at home, during Liturgical Services, Fr Tony wore the Medal of Honour with pride but also with great humility.

Our acrostic on Lourdes describes Fr Tony

L- laughter- He always enjoyed making people laugh- even though some of his jokes were a bit crummy

O-openness- he welcomed everyone with open arms and made them feel involved

U- understanding – he understood the importance of making sure that everyone felt included. He understood the difficulties that many families experienced

R-respectful of those with whom he was involved and was respected by all across the Archdiocese

D-dedication – his dedication to parish, to the Archdiocese, to his brother priests and to Lourdes

E-enjoyable and fun to be around, with a great sense of humour.

S- smile -that beautiful smile that shone from within

He was sustained in his final period of illness by logging onto the Lourdes website where he immersed himself in the daily Masses at the Grotto, the Blessed Sacrament and Marian Processions

As we celebrate the life of this quiet and humble priest whose priestly ministry had a profound and positive impact on his parish, the Archdiocese and Lourdes, let us pray Fr Tony's own special prayer.

May the Lord Jesus Christ be with you to protect you
May he go before you to lead you, stand behind you to give you strength
May he look upon you to bring you his peace and his blessing
And bring that same blessing to those you love in your lives and in your heart.
In the name of the Father, The Son and the Holy Spirit.

As many of us travel to Lourdes this summer, the first time since 2019, we will sorely miss his physical presence but we know he will be standing right beside us in front of the Grotto.

Rest in peace, our dear friend.