

Funeral Homily for Sr Mary Jude

Wednesday 4 August 2021 at 11am at The Main Chapel, Layhams Road, West Wickham.

MY name is John O'Toole and I was privileged to be Parish Priest of St Andrew's, Thornton Heath over twenty years and very fortunate to have Sr Mary Jude as a Parish Sister. I always felt safe and secure when Sr Mary Jude was around. She was a rock of stability.

First, my thanks to the Daughters of Mary and Joseph for the kind invitation to give the homily at this Funeral Mass for our beloved Sr Mary Jude. MY thanks also to my brother priests and brother deacons and to Sr Mary's Jude's Community and her family and friends who are gathered here for this Funeral Mass.

When Sr Annette kindly emailed me the lovely funeral booklet I emailed back to thank her and said: "Sr Mary Jude attended many funerals in her time and I think she would be pleased with the choice of readings and hymns for her own." Sr Annette emailed straight back to say – "She should be pleased with the choices as they were hers!"

So Sr Jude is speaking to us today in the hymns and readings that she chose. She shares the faith that sustained her and that sustains us. She has a message for each one of us and for all of us.

Back in the year 2000 I attended a retreat here, at West Wickham, at what was then the Emmaus Conference Centre. It was one of the best retreats I have ever attended. It was meant to be given jointly by the late Carmelite Fr Chris O'Donnell and the late and very gifted Sr Teresa Clements, herself both a daughter of Mary and Joseph and a good Thornton Heath girl. It is great to see Thornton Heath – and St Andrew's parish in particular - represented so well here today and I know that a special Mass was celebrated for Sr Mary Jude at St Andrew's last Monday evening. Shortly before the retreat I attended, Fr Chris was taken seriously ill and Sr Teresa was tempted to cancel the retreat but decided, after prayer, consultation and discernment, to go ahead and give the retreat on her own. I still have the notes I took of her excellent conferences which were on the first twelve chapters of the Gospel of John. I often use them and refer back to them. There may be others here who remember that retreat too. One thing that she said that struck me forcibly was when she mentioned, right at the beginning of the retreat, that the word "witness" is one of St John's favourite words in his Gospel and that the word "witness" comes from the Greek word for "martyr" – 'martyria' and that a martyr is **one who gives themselves totally** – and is not necessarily about shedding of blood. Sometimes this type of martyrdom is called "white martyrdom" – not a dying for the faith but a living for the faith. Not a shedding of blood but a shedding of sweat in doing God's work. .

As I reflected on the life of Sr Mary Jude, in the light of today's Scripture readings, I thought of how she lived her faith. She was a true witness, a martyr in this sense, in that she gave herself totally – and she did so – with no frills, no fuss, no fanfare. She did the ordinary things extra well – and she did them with patience, perseverance and prayer. I have always been struck by the poignant words in the Offertory hymn by Mgr Kevin Nichols – which we will sing shortly:

"The chances we have missed, the graces we resist
Lord in thy Eucharist take and redeem.

I think Sr Mary Jude took the chances she was given and lovingly received the graces she was offered. She was a good and faithful steward who can now enter into the joy of her Lord and Master.

When I was Parish Priest at St Andrew's I greatly admired the work that Sr Mary Jude did with the baptismal programme in particular. Rose and Albert Tang, as parents, worked as part of the Team with her and wrote the following about Sr Mary Jude's pastoral ministry:

"Sr Mary Jude was deeply involved in St Andrew's Baptism course for parents and would-be parents for many years. She was the main contributor and coordinator along with the assistance of two parish deacons and a small team of helpers. Her role was to welcome and prepare parents for the celebration of the sacrament of baptism. She continued to perform this very important role to further support and guide the children and parents after baptism.

Sr Mary Jude was always present at the church well before starting time, to set up and ensure the baby's parents, families and friends were welcomed into the church and then seated for the baptism. Her commitments behind the scenes were excellent demonstrations of her total dedication to ensuring that the sacrament of baptism be properly carried out in her parish of St Andrew's with utmost reverence.

Thank you to Canon John who asked both of us to join this Baptism Preparation Team. Needless to say, we gained a tremendous amount of knowledge from her. It was a great pleasure working with Sr Mary Jude for 10 years. "

Note how Albert and Rose speak of Sr Mary Jude's 'total dedication.' She gave herself totally. Like Sr Mary Jude, we have all attended many funerals and listened to many funeral homilies. I suspect very few of us remember the homilies but we will always remember the person – and perhaps today we will even remember some key words from the Scriptures we have listened to or of the hymns that we have sung as a personal word and a message of encouragement from Sr Jude today. Sr Mary Jude gave herself totally to the one who has himself totally to her as her Brother, her Shepherd and her Lord. The message I will take from Sr Mary Jude's life and ministry – and from this Funeral Mass - is summed up in the response she invited us to sing in the psalm which Sr Annette sang so beautifully:

Lord, you are my shepherd,
you are my friend.
I want to follow you always, just to follow my friend.

Mgr John O'Toole