



OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

Funeral Mass for Deacon Hyland Fraser

Homily

[Ecclesiastes 3:1-11a; Psalm 23; Romans 14: 7-9, 10b-12; Matthew 5: 1-12a]

Allow me to begin this homily by expressing to you, Harriett, to the children, grandchildren, foster children and members of the extended family our heartfelt condolences on the death of Hyland. He was loved by all of us, but by none more deeply than yourselves. Please know that you have today the pledge of our fervent prayers and ready accompaniment.

Speaking personally, I would like to thank you for asking me to preside at this mass and preach the homily. He was one of my deacons, and also a good friend, a man whom I admired greatly.

Now, I expect it will surprise no one if I tell a couple of stories. After all, what else would you expect when the funeral of a man from Nova Scotia is presided by another from that same province? In the normal course of life, Maritimers love to tell a story, for the story's own sake. Within the sacred liturgy, however, the story must serve the higher purpose of leading us into the Word of God. To that end, I will share with you this afternoon two tales arising from the ministry I shared with Deacon Hyland.

As you know, Hyland would often accompany me on travels throughout the Archdiocese. For the most part, he would drive quietly while I did some work, yet there were nevertheless many occasions for some long chats. We talked about many things, usually having to do with our families, of course, but on one occasion he shared an insight that has stayed with me ever since. I forget how the topic came up, but at one point he said this: "You know, isn't it amazing how people today will spend thousands of dollars on sophisticated home security systems in order to keep out people intending to do them harm, yet once safely ensconced inside, they let into their minds very dangerous influences by turning on the television, the Internet or the video game."

The question of who we let in is among the most urgent of our day, yet the one to which we pay perhaps the least attention. It is the very question Jesus is posing to us as we hear him preach the Beatitudes. We can summarize the Lord's teaching this way: Blessed are those who let God in. Blessed are those who recognize their need for God, who believe in his love, trust in his ways, and allow him to guide the course of their lives. Hyland was not afraid to let God in. Just the opposite – he did so eagerly and joyfully. What he did fear was granting entry to anything that would detract him from hearing the voice of his Lord and following wherever he led.

This brings me to the second story. When Deacon Hyland traveled with me, he would act as Master of Ceremonies for the mass. Here is the memory that stays with me. While I distributed Holy Communion, Hyland's role was to keep an eye on all that was happening.

Well, at least most of the time that's what he did. More than once after Communion I would catch him seated in his chair, that big smile on his face, tapping the foot. He was happily keeping time with the music! That was the Heatherton in him. I recall that now because of what we heard in the first reading. Hyland loved to keep time with music, yes, but far more important to him was keeping time with God. The passage from Ecclesiastes teaches that the events of our lives have their time appointed by God, who governs all of history. God establishes the rhythm and tempo of our lives; our call is to keep time with him by living in harmony with his commands and following wherever he leads us. Deacon Hyland kept time with God – happily.

My final point stems not from a story but an observation. Deacon Hyland was blessed with an extraordinarily generous heart. This is what happens when we let God into our lives and keep time with the beat of divine love. When we realize with St. Paul that, as followers of the Lord Jesus, we belong not to ourselves but God, then our hearts must be entirely given over to the Lord. God's love expands a heart offered fully to him, and causes it to flow over in compassion toward those in need. This is precisely what we all witnessed in Deacon Hyland. Together with Harriett, he gave himself joyfully to the care of others. This began, of course, with his family, the size of which has arisen precisely from that selfless and generous heart. His concern extended beyond the home to a variety of ministries in his parish, and to the care of the needy through the Marian Centre, the Young Offenders Centre and Mary's Meals. Finally, letting God's love into in his heart and keeping time with the Lord's will led him to the permanent diaconate, in the exercise of which he demonstrated to all of us the charitable essence of diaconal ministry and its clear necessity in the Church.

When Deacon Hyland passed over from this life into the hands of God, he was surrounded by his family as they prayed together the chaplet of Divine Mercy. That had been his wish, so precious to him was this particular devotion. Deacon Hyland lived in the certainty of the power of divine mercy over all that is evil, as perfectly manifested in the victory over sin and even death won by the Cross of Christ. He was fully dedicated to sharing the message of divine mercy in both word and deed to anyone in need of assurance and hope. Now, as we offer the mass, the supreme sacrament of mercy, for our beloved Hyland, we pray that God's mercy fully embrace his soul and usher him into the peace and joy of the heavenly kingdom.

Most Reverend Richard W. Smith

Holy Trinity Parish, Spruce Grove

February 12th, 2021