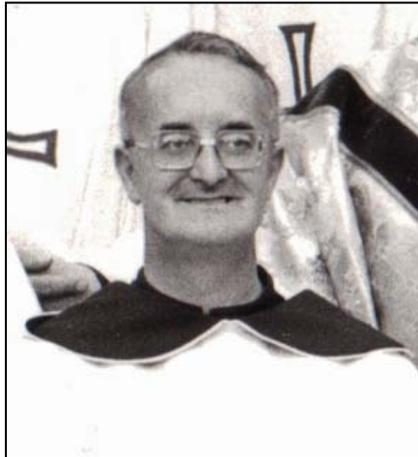


Obituary of Fr. Martin Sankey, O.Carm.



Fr. Martin at his simple profession in 1975

Francis Ignatius Sankey was born in Preston, Lancashire in 1933. He attended Preston Catholic College run by the Jesuits and after leaving school began his apprenticeship as a printer. He soon set his sights wider, joined the Royal Air Force and qualified as a specialist airframe fitter. His career with the RAF took him to Germany and Cyprus as well as to postings in the UK. In Cyprus he was largely instrumental in the building of a Catholic chapel on the base.

He came into contact with the Carmelite Friars during a military pilgrimage to Aylesford Priory in Kent and in April 1974 he applied to enter the novitiate to try his vocation as a Carmelite. He entered the Order in September 1974 at the age of 41 and took the religious name “Martin”.

Having made simple profession in 1975 he was sent to Rome where he became a member of the International Carmelite community at St. Albert’s College and completed the ordination course at the Beda College. Martin set out to make the most of the unique opportunity presented by living in Rome. In his spare time he trained and worked as a voluntary guide at St. Peters taking many hundreds of people around the basilica. With a background in Catholic Lancashire Martin had a strong loyalty to the person of the Pope and identified his faith closely with the place. In Rome he became friends with Monsignor McGee who at that time was private secretary to Pope Paul VI.

Martin made his Solemn Profession in Rome on 8th December 1978. The following summer, having completed his studies, he was ordained priest at Aylesford Priory on 22nd July 1979.

Martin’s first appointment was as shrine director at Aylesford. He ran the operation with all the precision he had learned in the RAF – an efficiency not always welcomed by his brothers who didn’t have the benefit of the same training!

After four years at Aylesford Martin was appointed as spiritual director to the Lay Carmelites in Britain. This appointment took him first to be a member of the Carmelite Community at English Martyrs Church, Walworth and then, because of its more central location nationally, to the Carmelite Community at Hazlewood Castle near York. Luckily Martin enjoyed being

on the road and each week would see him travelling to visit and support the different groups around the country, putting in some 24,000 miles a year. During this time he organised a number of pilgrimages earning him the nickname “Martin of Tours!”

With the withdrawal of the Carmelite Community from Hazlewood in 1996 Martin moved to Cheltenham and continued his work from there. Eventually, however, all the travel became too much of a burden and Martin took up a new appointment as chaplain to Nazareth House in Cheltenham. He brought to this new role all the energy and dedication that had marked his life to date and he found real joy in helping the sisters and the staff in the care of the residents and in celebrating the Eucharist with them each day.

He very much felt the loss of his only sister, Alice, before Christmas, and despite his own failing health was able to preside at her funeral liturgy. In the week before he died his own health began to give cause for concern and he was admitted to hospital in Cheltenham for tests. It was whilst in hospital that he had a heart attack and died peacefully just after midday on Friday 13th February 2003.

Martin had always said that he wanted to die with his boots on and it is probably true that he would have made a poor patient. Throughout his life he tried to serve God as faithfully as possible and never looked back, having put his own hand to the plough. He had a gift for welcoming people and leaves behind many people who would count him as a friend.

May God grant him a place of light, rest and peace.

