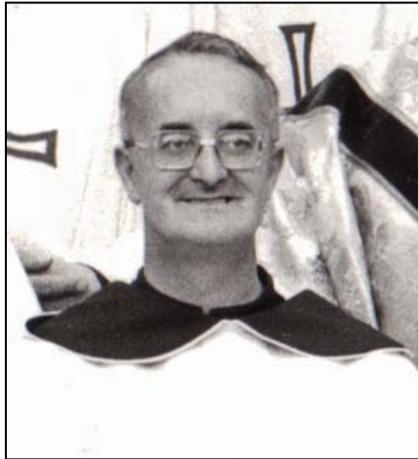


## Funeral Homily for Fr. Martin Sankey, O.Carm.



*Fr. Martin at his simple profession in 1975*

*Fr. Martin Sankey was born on 1<sup>st</sup> February 1933. He made profession as a Carmelite on 29<sup>th</sup> August 1975, and was ordained priest on 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1979. He died 13<sup>th</sup> February 2004. His funeral took place at Aylesford Priory in Kent, with the reception of remains and Evening Prayer at 6.30pm on Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> February, and Requiem Mass and burial in the Provincial cemetery at 11.30am on Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> February. The following homily was given by Fr. Antony Lester, O.Carm., Prior Provincial, at the Requiem Mass.*

The words we have just heard from St Paul *the life and death of each of us has its influence upon others* are most certainly true. Most of us, possibly all of us, are here because we knew Martin (Frank) Sankey. We knew him in different ways: as uncle, brother in law, Godfather, Carmelite brother, chaplain, colleague, friend and probably many other ways.

Martin was born in Preston, Lancashire some 71 years ago and was proud of his Lancastrian heritage (it has to be said that he had something to be proud of – not that I am biased in any way!). From the start his faith was important to him. As a young man he joined the Royal Air Force and this career took him to Germany and to Cyprus. It was from Cyprus that he was able to cadge a lift on a passing transport plane to Palestine to visit the holy places - this was the start of an ongoing love for the Land of the Holy One. His RAF base in Cyprus had no catholic chapel. Martin was the driving force behind getting one built - his energy and enthusiasm could be infectious and he was never afraid of getting his hands dirty.

Aged 41 he bumped into the Carmelites, here at Aylesford and at nearby Allington Castle which was then a Carmelite house. Through this contact he heard a different call and in 1974 he joined the noviciate here. We arrived to start Carmelite life together - a group of nine, Martin the eldest and me the youngest. Martin is the third of our group to die. Whilst at times he adopted the dignity of being the senior novice he had a mischievous sense of humour and his military training had taught him more than a little about getting round the rules. Smoking was banned but Martin could always lay his hands on a packet. Two days a week we were allowed out for a walk - Martin persuaded Brother John to drop us just outside a village nearby so that we could have a “good walk”. Just over the hill and we were inside in time for last orders! Once ordained though he was poacher turned gamekeeper and subsequent generations must have wondered how he spotted their scams quite so easily.

The transition from RAF to Carmelite life wasn't easy for Martin - much that he expected and wanted to be the same he found very different. From the beginning he had to struggle. Those of us who lived with him knew the effects of that struggle - on him and on us! It was a struggle that marked his life probably to the end but he had set his hand to the plough and he wasn't going to look back. He came into his own when he was appointed as spiritual director of the Third Order. A ministry which allowed him to find a balance between life in community and time on the road. He would cover some 24,000 miles a year visiting and supporting the groups in England, Scotland and Wales - a task which took energy, enthusiasm, faith and commitment.

In the last couple of years Martin served as chaplain to Nazareth House in Cheltenham. These were very happy years for him and I would like to publicly record our thanks to Sr. Magdalene and the community for their care and support of Martin whilst he was their chaplain.

We are here to commend Martin to God and to say farewell and we do so in the context of the same faith that nourished Martin's own life and gave it direction and focus. As we do so the scriptures speak to us that the *souls of the virtuous are in the hands of God ...they are at peace...that our lives and deaths have their effect...that an account must be given to God.*

Martin would be the first to ask us to pray for him - he had at times a remarkable humility. He could be easily hurt and knew that at times he hurt others. As all of us who celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation with other know only too well, we ourselves are in need of that same healing love of God.

And so this is the point our faith brings us to - prayer in the presence of the God who is mercy and love, that same God into whose presence Martin has now come. *God does not judge as we do, we see the appearances, God sees the heart* and so the hands that now hold Martin are safe and gentle. God, better than we and better than Martin even, sees the complexity of the life that was Martin's and is able to set him free.

Jesus tells us *when I have prepared you a place I shall come and take you home.* Martin trusted these words and just after midday last Friday this is what happened. Breathlessness and struggle over - at peace - words of understanding and friendship from the One who knows from the inside what it is to be frail and human.

Well done, good and faithful servant - God grant you peace.

