

Homily at the Requiem Mass for Donald W.T. Grant, O.Carm.



*Fr. Donald's gravestone
in the Braes of Glenlivet*

Fr. Donald's funeral took place at St. John the Baptist, Perth on Friday 18th July 1997 at 11.00 a.m., and he was buried in the Braes of Glenlivet. A Memorial Mass attended by many of his friends was celebrated at The Friars, Aylesford on Saturday, 16th August.

Donald's world was a very big world. The world of his desire and of his imagination was both very large and very imaginative. It was the world he sought for himself and the world of space he created for others, for you and for me. It was the world which his aching body tried to cover in those last remaining years, as, with a passion, he travelled here and there, when the medical profession and bystanders like ourselves would have said he should be quiet, settle down, stay in one place. Amazingly his doctor always said he was fit to travel. That was all he wanted to hear. He wanted to visit everyone he knew, spend time with them, visit their world. Of course, it was the desire to be with all those he knew and cherished. It was also his search for that world of beauty, the world as he believed God created it, but which he could never quite reach. The *Breastplate of St. Patrick* captures some of what Donald's death might mean: *This day God gives me strength of high heaven, sun and moon shining, flame in my hearth, flashing of lightning, wind in its swiftness, firmness of earth.* On this day, the day Donald died to all that is in this world, it was as if on this day God finally gave it all to him. *Rising I thank you, mighty and strong One, King of creation, Giver of rest, firmly confessing Threeness of Persons, Oneness of Godhead, Trinity blest.*

Donald loved the mountains and the oceans, the rivers, the valleys; he was drawn to the beauty of the Highlands, he was in ecstasy in Colorado and the Alps. But his visits to these places was always tinged with sadness. He could see them fleeting. Those moments would always come to an end, until the day when he would possess them fully.

One might wonder what happened to Donald in these last eleven years? I believe that cancer shattered both his body and his way of relating to the world and to people. His body became almost an enemy, the body he was so careful about throughout his pre-cancer years. His way of relating to people became increasingly centred on his own fight for survival. We saw him gradually lose the ability to be so totally concerned about others as he once was. He was being stripped of all that really mattered to him. The awful part of this was that he was aware of being stripped, without perhaps fully knowing what it meant. Donald had learned all about stripping and dark night in his studies. He knew all about the world of the mystics and their

journey of purification and transformation. He devoted much of his life to helping others to understand this process of liberation, while all the time it was happening to himself. In his latter years, his life affected more and more people. All of us felt drawn more and more, to him, in compassion, in wonderment, in admiration, but Donald was never to know the satisfaction which his influence on other people might have given him. It is as if he was never able to appreciate how much others appreciated him and loved him. He would do all he could to make things better, when all the time it was just his being there that made things different for others. It was not what he did for others that was so wonderful. It was the wisdom and humanity he had accumulated over the years, precisely because he was tested at every moment, and never took anything for granted, least of all the things that really mattered most - faith in God, the mission of the Church, the word of God, the friendship of others, family.

When we were in Portugal and the “community of six” kept vigil at his bedside, a moment came when it was possible to talk about impending death. In that moment I broached the subject of how he would like his funeral to be celebrated, asking what passages of Scripture he would like. He said that very often when he was working with others he would refer to that passage in St. Paul which says: *If God is for us, who can be against us*. He continued, that passage goes on to say: *I believe that nothing can separate us from the love of God*. When I think of how sick he was at that time and of how much uncertainty there had been in his life, those words are full of meaning. Then he began to speak about the Gospel. He said that one of his favourite passages is the one in which Jesus says: *Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink or about your body what you will wear*. It’s the passage about the birds of the air and the lilies of the field. Jesus uses these examples to give us an assurance of God’s unfailing Providence. None of us could say that Donald did not worry. Like Martha in the Gospel he worried and fretted about many things. One of the many contradictions in his life was the fact that he could help others not to worry, but seemed not to be able to take the worry out of his own life. In those last hours in the hospice his parting words to one of the group were: Don’t worry.

Since he first heard the musical, *Les Miserables*, he was taken by the song, *Where do we go from here?* For him it was a very poignant question. Now he lies in the earth he loved, in a small cemetery, on a hill, in the Braes of Glenlivet. Burying Donald in Scotland is a break with a well-respected tradition in his own Province and represents a real sacrifice for the members of the Province who would like to feel that he is still among them by being buried in Aylesford. To be buried in Scotland was Donald’s own request and, deep down, though out of respect, they were slow to express it, it was the desire his many cousins with whom he had spent so much time in recent years. The Province whose first home is in Aylesford is the Province which four years ago made the brave move to send Donald, along with Paul (de Groot) and Pat (O’Keeffe) and later Frank (Crossan) to Scotland. By doing so they were fulfilling a long-held desire in the Province to re-connect with the Carmelite Order which had come to Scotland centuries before and put houses in Perth and Aberdeen. The presence of the Carmelites in Aberdeen has re-awakened some of that tradition and plugged into the ancient Catholic roots in the Highlands. I cannot help but believe that burying Donald in the Highlands puts a seal on that endeavour. It is as if another chapter is being added to the story so that each time the story is told, people’s hearts will burn again.

It is perhaps but a coincidence that this year we celebrate the centenary of the death of St. Thérèse of Lisieux. Therese said that she would spend her life in heaven doing good on the earth. The way she has kept that promise, apart from the particular favours granted through her intercession, is by leaving us her Autobiography, *The Story of a Soul*. The good she has

done and continues to do more and more is by leaving us the account of her journey to God. It is much the same with Donald. We won't remember so much all the millions of ways he put himself out to help people, but we will remember the story of a life and death which caught our imagination.

As I think about Donald, I remember the things which he felt most deeply, the kind of mission he took on when he became a Christian, a religious and a priest. He loved to see people discover themselves and grow to maturity. He believed deeply in the gift and integrity of creation. He suffered real pain for the plight of the poor. These were to mark his life and to remain largely unfulfilled dreams. They are things to be worked for and to he prayed for. I believe I will do that better because of Donald, Donald as he lived and Donald as he died.

The friend of the bridegroom rejoices to hear the bridegroom speak. I rejoiced often when Donald spoke, now perhaps even more so because his dream is still alive and the contradictions are gone. God give him rest.

Ni bheidh a leithead ann arís (*trans.* The like of him will never be seen again).

Míceál O'Neill, O.Carm.