

Requiem Mass for the Very Reverend Dom Luke Waring
23rd June 2016

“They who trust in God will understand the truth, those who are faithful will live with him in love; for grace and mercy await those he has chosen.” We heard these words from the Book of Wisdom proclaimed this afternoon. Could there be a better text to sum up the nature and purpose of our Christian faith, the faith for which Fr Luke lived and in which he died? Trust in God, understanding the truth, being faithful, living in love, being chosen by God, waiting on his grace and mercy. These words sum up not only Fr Luke's faith but the story of his life. We are gathered here today to offer the Sacrifice of the Mass for the repose of his soul and to pray that God will be merciful to him on the Day of Judgement. No one more acutely aware of his sins than Fr Luke, he asked before he died that we always remember him in our prayers.

John Vincent Waring was born in Leyland on 6th April 1927 to Henry and Sylvia, the first of six children, two of whom died in infancy. He was proud to have been born in Lancashire and to be of recusant Catholic stock. In 1938 he passed from St Mary's School, Leyland, to the Jesuit run Preston Catholic College, where he excelled in studies, but not in music or in games: he was tone deaf and too uncoordinated to take part in ball games. Not that he wasn't athletic, for, with his tall, lean build, he was later to become a first class cyclist and a keen walker. After obtaining excellent grades in the Higher School Certificate, he came to Belmont as a postulant in 1945. When asked why he didn't become a Jesuit, he always said it was the example of the Ampleforth monks at St Mary's that made him dream of becoming a Benedictine. Throughout his life he retained a deep affection for his family, his hometown and the parish of his youth.

At Belmont he came under the influence of its cultured abbot, Dom Aidan Williams, and its saintly and austere novice master, Dom Benedict Adams. He was clothed in 1946 and made his First Profession on 29th June 1947. When he died on 9th June, he had been a monk for 70 years. He began his priestly formation at Belmont and in September 1949 was sent to Fribourg in Switzerland to study theology. In the meantime, on 15th September 1950, he made his Solemn Profession under Abbot Anselm Lightbound. Br Luke cycled to and from Fribourg each year and in 1950, the Holy Year, cycled to Rome on pilgrimage. He was ordained to the Sacred Priesthood by Archbishop Michael McGrath of Cardiff on 13th July 1952. He completed his Licentiate in Theology in June 1953 and returned to Belmont. In Switzerland he acquired a good knowledge of both French and German, which he spoke with a pronounced Lancashire accent, as well as furthering his studies in New Testament Greek and becoming a Hebrew scholar. Scripture and theology were to become the passions of his life, together with history, that of the Catholic Church in Britain and of the English Benedictine Congregation in particular.

On his return from Fribourg, Fr Luke was appointed Assistant Priest of Belmont, for the abbot was technically the parish priest. Although he did the work, he had no authority or control over the finances. It was not until 1963 that he was made Parish Priest. He became renowned for his pastoral zeal,

visiting every home once a month on his bicycle, no matter the distance or the weather. He made many converts and loved having a few pints in every village pub, chatting with the men in the public bar and sharing his packed lunch, made by himself with the leftovers of his breakfast. However, he felt unfairly treated by the abbot and some of the brethren, who had little respect for the parish, and, to his dying day, he spoke of the hurt this caused him. Nevertheless, he became a legend in his own lifetime, wherever he served, and that began with the Belmont parish. He knew everyone by name and each family history in detail. People loved him because, like Jesus, he loved them and he would go out of his way to help them, no matter what the problem. Long before the phrase "preferential option for the poor" became common coinage in the Catholic Church, it was the poor, the needy, the marginalized and the underdog who were the focus of his attention. With Luke you could see what Jesus meant when he said, "The first will be last and the last first."

While looking after the parish, he also taught Philosophy, Canon Law and Sacred Scripture to young monks in formation. In 1966 he was appointed Novice Master by Abbot Robert Richardson. He was in post until 1971 and again from 1973 to 1976. Many of us passed through his hands and he left an indelible mark on our personalities and monastic vocations. He was strict and demanding, for ever checking up on us to see if we were all doing our sacristy work together or doing spiritual reading and mental prayer at the right time, sitting or kneeling in the correct position. But with the weak he was indulgent and far too kind. When an irate novice complained to him during Holy Week that one of his companions wasn't turning up to do his work, Fr Luke promptly replied, "He's just getting over Christmas!" At times he would have you pulling out your hair, like on those month days when he'd walk the novices all the way up Orcop Hill, for example, and make us take turns in carrying the heavy box of sandwiches, apples and crisps, only to be left with nothing to eat as he passed them round his cronies in the pub, "Have a sandwich." His classes, rather like his homilies, could be a struggle for his hearers, and so it seemed for himself, with his idiosyncratic delivery of strangled 'aaghs' and painful pauses, but he knew his stuff and shared with us a wisdom second to none.

In 1970 Abbot Jerome appointed him Claustal Prior, a role he was to take up again later under Abbot Mark. Then in 1971 he was named Bursar, hardly a task for which he was suited, but Fr Luke was an obedient monk, who did whatever he was asked, even the impossible, to the best of his ability. Two years later he was able to hand over to our first lay bursar, Major Leo Oddie. It's true to say that Fr Luke held every office at Belmont other than that of abbot. In 1976 he was sent to be Prior of Llanarth, our prep school in Monmouthshire. Sr Mavis Therese Baylis, now a Carmelite nun at Dolgellau and founder of a Carmel in Lithuania, has many fond memories of working with him. "I remember school holidays in France when we unwittingly did a good deal of smuggling, not having taken on board that minors were not allowed to buy and bring home bottles of wine for their parents. The coach driver was more clued up, packing the bottles right at the back of the boot, shielded by rows of strong smelling cheeses, and all concealed by suitcases. The customs officers were suffocated by the cheese and went no further in

their investigation. Fr Luke stood by with his most characteristic and genial expression."

In 1977 he was appointed Parish Priest of St Begh's, Whitehaven, where his pastoral skills were put to good use in this large, traditional West Cumbrian parish, which at the time still had four curates and four Mass centres. However, in 1981 he was chosen by Abbot Jerome to be one of the founding fathers of our Peruvian monastery and its first Prior. After an intensive Spanish course in Bolivia, Fr Luke, Fr David and I arrived in Lima on 6th August, moving north to Tambogrande in the Archdiocese of Piura on 20th. Fr Luke was to remain in Peru for ten years, all of them spent in the vast rural Parish of San Andrés, the first five as superior, the last five as parish priest. Here Fr Luke became more than a legend, he almost became a saint. He served the people with a spirit of humility, self-sacrifice and heroic endeavour, witnessed only in the lives of the saints, to whom the people had great devotion. During the torrential rains caused by the Niño in 1983, strapping a kitbag to his back, he would jump almost naked into rivers and torrents in spate and swim to distant villages to celebrate Mass or anoint the sick. One such village, the poorest in the parish, was La Rita, with a population of 10,000. When the floods subsided, they decided to build a new church and named it St Luke, not in honour of the evangelist, but of Padre Lucas, their hero and their friend. A book could be written about his exploits in Peru: it would make better reading than a novel by Vargas Llosa or Graham Greene.

On his return from Peru, he became assistant priest to Fr Thomas at Our Lady's, Hereford, before moving on to Weobley and Kington as Parish Priest, until, in 1995 he was asked by Abbot Mark to help out in Peru for a year before becoming Novice Master and Claustal Prior at Belmont. When I became abbot at the end of 2000, I asked him to become Parish Priest of St Francis Xavier, then, at the age of 75, to help out as assistant priest at Whitehaven and, finally, to be Parish Priest of St David's, Swansea, until, sadly, we relinquished that incorporated parish to the Diocese of Menevia at the end of 2008, by which time Fr Luke was almost 82. In January 2009 he became Chaplain to the Benedictine nuns at Colwich Abbey, Staffordshire, where he flourished in the company of the nuns and of his cat Diana. Fr Luke adored cats and in the course of his life had at least four, all called Diana. In recognition of his services to Belmont and the English Congregation, the Abbot President made him Cathedral Prior of Rochester and he was invited to preach at Rochester Cathedral.

Towards the end of 2012 he came home to Belmont to live in our infirmary and to be cared for by the brethren. At first he was mobile and took part in much of the daily life, but gradually he became more and more incapacitated, yet dismissing his physiotherapist and often disagreeing with the diagnosis and treatment offered by his doctor. Fr Luke was and always had been a hypochondriac, who enjoyed the attention of doctors and nurses, yet always preferring to seek a second opinion. This could be amusing and frustrating at the same time: he was not easy to live with. As he loved to say, "You can tell a Lancashire man, but you can't tell him much."

As he grew weaker, he found it difficult to accept the limitations of infirmity and old age: he always wanted to do more than he could and planned outings and holidays. In fact, he was just a few days' off a reunion with his altar servers' cycling group, when he suffered a stroke and had to be hospitalized. Fortunately, this happened during the night, so he didn't fall or break a bone, nor did he lose his memory. He was wonderfully looked after by the staff at Hereford County Hospital and then at Oaklands Nursing Home, where he died peacefully, shortly after being anointed, on the evening of 9th June. He simply stopped breathing. While still at Belmont, he spent a lot of time reading in a variety of languages and enjoyed talking about all aspects of the English Benedictine life, local history, Lancashire, his beloved family and Peru. He kept contact with friends and relations, writing letters, making telephone calls and receiving visitors. His powerful memory, that phenomenal gift of God, never failed him. He was knowledgeable about so many things. If you had a doubt about Greek grammar, the interpretation of a Hebrew text, some point of Canon Law, the history a Herefordshire village or a Whitehaven, Swansea or Tambogrande family, anything related to Belmont and its monks or any other topic, you simply asked Fr Luke. Long before Google and far more reliable, there was Fr Luke.

A great light has gone out in our lives. One of our great men has left us. We are the richer for knowing him, the poorer for losing him. But Fr Luke did not live for this world only: he lived and longed for heaven. "I hope the Lord won't keep me waiting," he would say. The Lord answered his prayer and has taken him to Himself. As Catholics we believe and hope he is in Purgatory, that great furnace of love and purification, being prepared with the help of our prayers, to enter into the light of Heaven, where he will see the God he loved and served face to face. "Grace and mercy await those he has chosen." This is what he truly believed, so we pray for him today, "Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon him. May he rest in peace. Amen."