Remembering

Fr Noel Connolly, SSC

Columban Missionary Priest
Entered Eternal Life: June 6, 2020

Friend and Spiritual Guide of
Chinese Catholic Community Inc
Sydney NSW Australia

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Preface

FR MICHAEL GOONAN SSP

It is with pleasure that I accepted to help put together this booklet of remembrance and appreciation for Fr Noel Connolly who, amongst many other responsibilities, celebrated Mass on a regular basis for the Chinese Catholic Community (CCC) in Sydney for close to 20 years, until his passing in June of this year.

I first met Fr Noel Connolly many years ago, but it was only in the past five years that I got to know him better as we both assisted CCC in the Sunday liturgies, and participated in various social events and anniversaries organised by the community. In recent years I also had the opportunity to hear Noel speak on several occasions in his capacity as a member of the Plenary Council Facilitation Team.

Like everyone, I came to enjoy and value the company of Noel. He was a great conversationalist, happy to share many stories that were both humorous and wise. It was easy and enriching to spend an hour in his company, over a good meal and a nice wine, sharing experiences and observations.

Since Noel's death I have had the privilege of reading quite a few of the sermons he preached to the Chinese Catholic Community. It has

been a valuable exercise. Too often priests give sermons; too rarely do they hear them. I learned more about Noel from his sermons as he weaved through them many stories and experiences from his life as a Columban priest and missionary, and from his family life.

Fr Noel's sermons have a consistently positive message. Jesus Christ is the Saviour of the world. Salvation is his task, not ours. It is not all up to us. Thankfully! Jesus Christ leads us into freedom, is with us in the most challenging moments and hears our cries. Ultimately life is not only about loving others; it is also about letting our good God and our brothers and sisters love us. Therein lies the ultimate surrender.

We could have published every sermon Fr Noel preached to the Chinese Catholic Community over the years. My task was to select just five for this commemorative booklet. It was no easy task.

In one of his sermons, Fr Noel says of Jesus: 'He didn't give lectures or long detailed explanations of doctrine instead he told stories and spoke to the heart. His authority lay in the fact that his listeners knew that what he said was profoundly true and of God.' These words can also be said of Fr Noel Connolly. May he rest in peace.

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Tributes to Fr Noel Connolly SSC

FROM FR GERARD KELLY, CCC SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR

Father Noel Connolly was a great friend to the Chinese Catholic Community, so it was with deep sadness that we heard of his death on 6 June 2020. In remembering him, we give thanks to God for Fr Noel's life and ministry. He was a priest for fifty years, and served God and the People of God in many parts of the world. He was member of the Missionary Society of St Columban, and the passion for mission remained with him right to the end.

His first appointment after his ordination was to Seoul, South Korea. He worked hard there, mastered the language and was close to the people. After this, he was sent to Rome to undertake graduate studies in Moral Theology. Once he had completed these studies, he returned to Sydney and began teaching in the St Columban's seminary in North Turramurra. Within a couple of years, he was appointed the rector of the college. Several years later, he became the vicar general of the Columbans worldwide and lived in Dublin, Ireland. He had the opportunity and the responsibility to visiting Columban missionary priests in many different parts of the world, and offered them support and friendship.

When he completed his term as vicar general, he returned to Sydney and began to celebrate Mass for CCC on a monthly basis. He continued this right up until February this year, with one small gap when he was the regional director of the Columbans and lived in Melbourne.

I know we all valued his presence among us. We experienced his kindness and friendship. He loved people, and had deep concern for all people. He wanted to see the Chinese community flourish.

He once told me that CCC was admirable for its leadership in the community and the way so many people had worked to ensure that all the members had access to Mass and other occasions that would nourish their faith. In an era when there were fewer and fewer priests to serve the Catholic people, the community had never had a Sunday without Mass. Fr Noel thought this was a blessing, and he recognised the good work of the leaders of the community.

For most members of the community, the usual contact with Fr Noel was at the Sunday Mass. There they would listen to his homily. He was a man a deep wisdom, who understood the challenges we all face. He had a remarkable gift of helping us understand the Gospel and its relevance in our daily lives. He was not afraid to challenge us with that same Gospel, just as Jesus challenged those who listened to him.

One of the last conversations I had with Fr Noel was shortly after the last Mass he had with the Chinese community. Already by then he was becoming tired and exhausted, as the cancer began to take over and he underwent multiple treatments. The thing I remember him telling me was that he had spoken in his homily about his situation and how, at this time, he was becoming even more aware that people loved him. I believe that this is not only a tribute to the many people who loved him, but also a lesson for all of us in living the gospel. If we cannot let other people love us, then perhaps we will not allow God to love us.

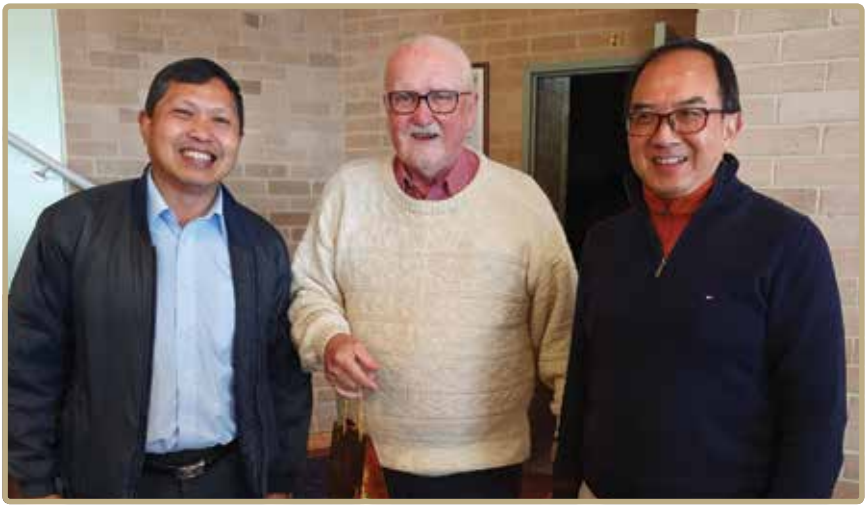
Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord.

FROM JOE KWAN, PRESIDENT OF CCC

Fr Noel Connolly is a long term friend of our Chinese Catholic Community (CCC) in Sydney. He first put his footsteps into the CCC history in late '90, while he would celebrate a Mass for us occasionally while visiting Sydney. He said the late Fr Cyril Hally convinced him to help out our community.

From 2003, he was able to celebrate our Mass more frequently as he started settling back in Sydney, and gradually he was able to celebrate Mass for us regularly. To the eyes of our community members, his figure is highly distinguishable – cheerful, learned, humorous, approachable and knowledgeable of our culture. We always treated Fr Noel as one of our members and shared our experiences with him. We enjoyed talking with him on almost any topic – religious, church, holidays, life, culture, hobbies … for hours over a coffee or wine.

His extensive exposure to Asian culture during his early priesthood in Korea helped him understand our background and culture. In his congratulation message to our 35th anniversary, he quoted a statement with his customary sense of humour:



I have always enjoyed the energy and devotion of your Masses and the meals both in the hall after Mass and during special celebrations. Unfortunately, they haven't helped me to stay trim and taut.

Working in many countries over the years, he built up a lot of life experience. This was frequently reflected in his homily, where he would relate some nice attention-attracting stories from his past experience to illustrate his teaching. Many stories were about his childhood, his family and parents, which were very moving for us. He did not teach us just from the words in the Bible, but also how to live the teaching of the Bible.

Though we cannot learn more from Fr Noel now, his teaching will remain with us, guiding us for the future years.

FROM HUDSON CHEN KCHS, OAM, ADVISOR TO CCC

Dear Fr Noel,

Thank you for helping us in the Chinese Catholic Community Inc (CCC), in Sydney since the year 2002. Your continuous support, services and advice offered to the Community are enormously valued.

Your vibrant character and homilies have been an example for us to follow. We will remember you forever. You have a permanent place in the history book of CCC.

You been our spiritual leader, celebrant, and friend for everyone. Your sharings with us about your life in Ireland and Korea have been the hightlight of your teachings to us all. You took us with you into your past, sharing the hardships and joys of your life.

You were not only our spiritual leader but also our teacher in daily living – how to forgive others' faults, at the same time how to enjoy

good wine, spirits and food. I still owe you a bottle French *Lafeit* which you wanted to taste.

At the end of each Mass, you never failed to show your appreciation to the altar servers, choir and, in particular, the translators. You often asked me with a smile why we laughed at the translated homily even though you could not remember having written anything so funny. You always wanted to share our lives by spending time with us.

Your involvement in the Plenary Council brought you even closer to our daily living.

We miss you but rejoice that you will continue to pray for us in Heaven, as we journey to our eternal home.

Rest in Peace, Fr Noel.

FROM THOMAS TSE

It is sad to know Fr Noel has left us, even though we know for sure he is returning to his loving Lord and enjoying his well-deserved peace in heaven.

It is our honour and absolute privilege to have been working with Fr Noel during the past twenty years as he served our Chinese community. His tireless effort and commitment in enhancing our Catholic faith have converted many Chinese parishioners of Eastwood to become more fully the children of God.

We know Fr Noel had fulfilled many important duties and senior responsibilities in the Church's mission and he was rightly proud of his achievements. He always weaved his personal history into his homily as a life example of God's work for his children. We admire his achievements in the Church. We love him as a gentleman, a committed priest, and a caring friend. In him, we see the unconditional love of our Lord. In his homily, he always asked us to look out for the weak and marginal in our society. He asked us not to hinder them through our shortcomings but to understand their needs. As he said in one of his homilies, if we cannot see our brothers and sisters who need our help, perhaps we are still living in the dark.

We are saddened by the sudden departure of Fr Noel. But consciously we can feel happy for knowing him. He has left us a good spirit to continue his journey in making this world a better place for everyone. We pray for the repose of his soul and ask for his peace in heaven.

Lord, hear our prayer!

FROM JOANNA WOO

Fr Noel Connolly – my beloved teacher

I have known Fr Noel for many years since he celebrated Mass in St Monica's Church and then in St Kevin's Church. I am one of the translators who work with him. It was also my honour to be his student in a post-graduate course in 2018, Evangelising Mission Today. Translation and study are not easy tasks. I have to put a lot of effort into them. But it is all worthwhile because I have learnt so much from such a great mentor and teacher as Fr Noel. I cannot hide my sadness in saying goodbye to him. However, I cannot stop smiling when I recall his stories, humour and kindness. I would like to take this opportunity to share my bits and pieces about him.

Challenges in translation

When I was at the early stage of doing translation in St Monica's, it was always a nerve-wracking experience. Technically, it divided into two parts: translation and presentation during Mass. At that time, I remembered that I kept praying: "please don't let it be Fr Noel." For an ordinary homily, it would take 3 hours for the translation. For the "extraordinary" homily of Fr Noel, it would take me 5 hours! Why? At that time, he usually included the most updated church document and the official Chinese translation was not yet available. I had to try my best to translate it. An extremely hard and challenging job! However, it also forced me to read and learn the church teaching.

Fr Noel is very famous in telling stories. How can I know? He usually added a brief story or joke before he started his homily. It was good for the congregation but not so good for the translator like me. I always struggled at that moment. Should I translate the story as well? Could I convey the same sense of humor like him? I remember that Fr Noel looked at me with a smile and said "feel free to translate it. I don't care". He always showed such a good sense of humour either in his homily or in his life. "Rejoice in the Lord always.

I shall say it again: Rejoice" (Phil 4:4). Fr Noel was the best person to show joy in his life.

Being humble

When I first enrolled in the course of Evangelising Mission Today, I did not have much idea of what mission is. Fr Noel blew my mind away in the lectures. He stated that all Christians have a mission of evangelisation because our church is evangelizing by nature. Jesus has set a very good example for us to spread the good news of the Kingdom of God to different people. Before our mission, Fr Noel reinforced the importance of the attitude of "being humble". I remember that he talked about it in the very first lecture. We have to be humble in the process of evangelisation. Being humble is not "I am incapable. You are better than me." Rather, it is the attitude of, "I can do it. But I am OK if you do it". He shared his precious experience in South Korea. He tried to bring Christianity to the local people by learning and respecting their culture. He celebrated Mass in their local language. He even shared some jokes with us related to the cultural differences. He taught us that Christian faith could prosper in Western culture, and could also blossom in Asian culture like in South Korea.

His humble attitude was observed throughout the lectures. His students, including me, came from different cultures. After he had

presented his information, he always asked our opinions and the differences in our own cultures. He always showed interest to learn things from us. We had to do presentations of various topics. There is no doubt that he is the expert and knows all the information. However, I did not feel him to be a teacher prepared to criticise our work. Rather, he listened very attentively and gave positive feedback. At the end of the presentation, he always added: "Thank you for the presentation. I learnt from you". You cannot imagine how important it is for a student to hear this encouragement from their teacher. Fr Noel was a teacher who is generous with support and encouragement.

His last homily – Weakness is strength

In February 2020, I was rostered to do the translation on that Sunday. I knew that it was Fr Noel. While I was waiting for the homily to arrive, I did have a look on the readings. There was a verse in the second reading: "I came to you in weakness and fear and much trembling" (1Cor 2:3). I did not have much feeling about it until I received Fr Noel's homily. At that time, he had undergone chemotherapy and become weak physically. He used his own experience in the homily to explain to us the power of weakness. I remember that I had taken 4 hours to do the translation. Not because it was a difficult sermon quoting a church document. It was his struggles of accepting his weakness and allowing others to love him that was so touching that I could not stop my tears. He exposed his vulnerability to all of us. How brave he was!

On that Sunday morning, I prepared myself well enough to do the translation. I remembered that I kept on reminding myself: "don't cry, don't ruin the homily". When I saw Fr Noel walking slowly with a stick and needing support to get up to the altar, I could not help myself and burst into tears. He was weak physically, but he did not let the weakness stop him serving God. He was determined to keep working and celebrate Mass within his limitations. He accepted his weakness and let others to love him. He acted on what he preached.

How about us? Do we have the courage to accept our weakness and allow God's love to strengthen us?

"I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." (2 Tim 4:7). We love you and we miss you, Fr Noel.

Joanna Woo

FROM LUCY LEUNG

It is really a blessing to have known Fr Noel and to have had him in CCC. I feel it is different now and I am deeply sad at losing him. He was such a good and lovely priest with a rich knowledge in so many areas. He was a good listener and joy to be around.

He was humble priest. He always came to serve, like when he washed the feet at the Holy Thursday Mass at Santa Sabina in April 2016.

He was easy going and respected by the young people especially during his preparation for the wedding Mass of my daughter in the North Sydney Church in July 2017. And there were so many other acts of kindness he did.

My last time seeing him was in February when he came to Eastwood with the walking stick, showing that he is so determined. So faithful, thoughtful and considerate with his last beautiful and meaningful homily in Eastwood. I will share some of Fr Noel's last homily as I love what he said:

> *I have had two months of physical weakness. I do not like it, not only because of the suffering involved but also because I do not like being weak. I am used to being strong and successful. Now I cannot do many things I am used to doing, I have to slow down and I need the help of others.*
>
> *We need to be humble and confident enough to let people love us. We need to trust in God when we are weak,*

because being weak is also part of being human, part of the Incarnation, part of being like Jesus. We are not only like God when we are loving others. It is a beautiful thing to love. It is perhaps an even more gracious and beautiful thing to be loved. Then we are releasing the lover in others.

Fr Noel has been around CCC since 2003, saying Masses at either Lindfield, North Parramatta, Camperdown or Eastwood. He came to CCC to help out because of Fr Cyril Hally who convinced him to come. He mentioned that Fr Cyril was one of the most influential people in his life. Fr Cyril had told him a lot of stories about China, and he said the Columbans were founded by Bishop Edward Galvin for China. He was the first Bishop of Hanyang, a part of the city of Wuhan. So, through his influence, Fr Noel dreamed of going to China but it wasn't possible in 1970. But when he was in Hong Kong on one occasion, he climbed the observation tower in Fanling to look out over China for the first time. He was full of excitement at seeing a large country, with such a rich culture and long history.

It was exciting for him to work with the Chinese community from the start. The part he was not used to was writing the homily in advance, but he did mention that it became a good discipline and he thought that writing it early normally meant a better homily. He hoped this was the case.

We love you Fr Noel, you were a good and great Father. May your goodness, energy, hope and vision live in us. Rest in Peace in our Merciful God. Amen

FROM GERALD CHAN

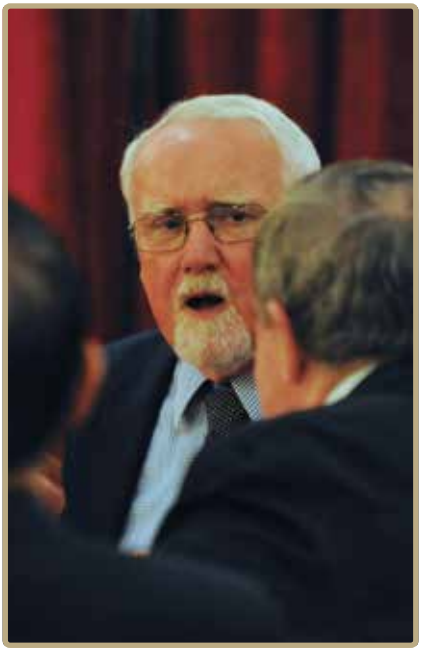
I've known Fr Noel Connolly for many years and he was very approachable and down to earth. No matter how busy he was, he would still have the time to have a chat, just to check up on how I am going etc. He was a great speaker and I really enjoyed his short but precise homilies on how the daily scriptures could be applied to our daily lives by giving examples from his own life journey. It takes a strong man to share his own past experiences with the general public, including his failings and how he overcame them. He will be sorely missed amongst the many communities he was a part of, especially with the Chinese Catholic Community.

FROM HAROLD PON

Fr Noel has been a dear friend to the Chinese Catholic Community for many years. He has celebrated Mass and provided spiritual direction to many members of the community during a time when we didn't have an appointed Spiritual Director. Personally, I learnt a lot from Fr Noel during my faith development as an adolescent. His homilies were always "down to earth" in applying the Gospel (Good News) to the modern age. In particular, his stories of his time as a missionary in Korea were truly inspiring – following the footsteps of Christ and living out the mission of the St Columban's Missionary Society – he courageously travelled to Korea to evangelise in an Eastern culture that was very different to the "Christian West" whilst learning the language (which is an amazing feat). I was very fortunate to have been able to serve as an acolyte at his last Mass with the Chinese Catholic Community in Eastwood before the Covid-19 shut down. I'll forever treasure his key message to us in the homily: "to allow others to help you is to allow them to love you.".

Rest in peace Fr Noel, thank you for all that you have taught us and being a role model in the Catholic faith.

FROM JOCELYN WONG



I always looked forward to hearing Fr Noel's homilies. He somehow always managed to share the Gospel's message in a way that was easy to understand, even for a teen or a young adult. Fr Noel tended to share his own life experiences which felt more engaging. The last Mass he celebrated with us at St Kevin's CCC Mass was definitely the most memorable and most touching. Fr Noel spoke about how we need to learn to be "humble and confident enough to let people love us". Sometimes, we may also need to accept that we are weak and allow others to help and love us. I have enjoyed every Mass Fr Noel celebrated with us. He will be deeply missed.

FROM JONATHON LEUNG

Fr Noel was a deeply spiritual and learned priest, with a genuine passion for people and community, especially the Chinese Catholic Community in Eastwood. We are truly blessed to have enjoyed his ministry and friendship for many years. May his soul rest in peace.

FROM PAUL AND BARBARA YEUNG

We came to know Fr Noel Connolly as a missionary disciple of the Lord, and were deeply inspired by his openness, frankness, gentleness and boldness in his many writings and homilies. Fr Noel carried the authenticity of an ecclesial charism, seamlessly integrated into his life of holiness and faithfulness for the good of all. Fr Noel, may you rest in peace and in the Divine Communion of everlasting life and love shared by the Lord Jesus and the Father.

FROM KAREN ASAWA

We feel blessed to have attended Mass presided by Fr Noel over the past 2 years since we joined CCC in Eastwood. I used to look forward to hearing Fr Noel's sermons because he always had an interesting perspective to share with us from his life's journey and his deep understanding of Catholicism. His honesty, humour and empathy for our daily struggles made his sermon a joy to listen to. I always came away from Mass feeling hopeful, empowered and full of purpose.

I am also grateful to Fr Noel for always being so kind and approachable to the Sunday School children. My son loved bouncing up to the altar when Fr Noel called the children forward to receive God's blessing. Fr Noel made each child feel welcomed and special with his gentle demeanour and great sense of humour.

Our Sunday celebrations at St Kevin's will not be the same without Fr Noel. You will be missed but your legacy and teaching will live on in our hearts.

FROM EVELINE CHEN JP DCHS

Fr. Noel is an inspiration figure of my life over 20 years

He was a true missionary disciple of the Lord, great shepherd to CCC especially to me. I enjoyed his homilies & spiritual messages.

He was an outstanding religious icon, blessed with many gifts especially holiness, faithfulness, humble, frankness, gentle care and kindness to all of us. He always uplifts me after each confession. A great counsellor!!!!

Fr. Noel your presence is sadly missed at the Altar, Eve's Kitchen and many social gatherings.

Lord grants Fr. Noel eternal rest and let perpetual light shine upon him.

With fond and loving memories of a wonderful priestly man and friend!!

Last supper

FROM SR TERESIA SEETO, RSJ

For me, the words of T. Watts & M. O'Brien applies to Fr Noel Connolly:
We are travelers here, called to embrace the world
Inspired to love, united we stand as one
We are travelers here stirred by a burning desire
Christ offers hope a spirited holy fire

My association with the Columban Fathers dated back to my life in Fiji.I was involved in the Legion of Mary and our Spiritual Director was Fr Gerard Hurley.Then I met Fr Cyril Halley when I joined the Chinese Community at Ashfield/Haymarket.

When I returned from Hong Kong I joined the CCC at Camperdown, then we branched out to North Parramatta. There I met up with the Columbans again, Fr Noel Connolly andFr Brian Vale. I have a great love and admiration for the Columban Fathers, their great dedication to living the Life of Jesus, they seem to embrace wholeheartedly the Asian Culture.

Fr Noel Connolly had lived a life of self-giving. Together let us thank and treasure him for his love and inspiration for us. May we follow his example of loving service.

Congratulations
FR. Noel
50th Ordination

萬事勝意

ST. KEVIN'S C

30th

A Selection of Homilies

PREACHED BY FR NOEL CONNOLLY SSC
TO THE CHINESE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY IN SYDNEY

A LENTEN SERMON

Fifth Sunday Lent, Year A

Delivered at St Kevin's, Eastwood, on 2 April 2017

There is an extraordinary book written by a Frenchman, Jean-Dominique Bauby. It is called *The Diving Bell & the Butterfly*. It is a remarkable book not only because of the story it tells but the way in which it was written. In December 1995, the author, aged in his early 40s, suffered a massive stroke that left him completely paralysed, speechless and able only to move his left eyelid. With that one eyelid he 'dictated' his book.

How can a speechless man dictate a book using only his left eyelid? Someone would read aloud the letters of the alphabet and with a blink of his eye Bauby would stop the reader at the appropriate letter. The book was in fact dictated letter by letter. We can only imagine how difficult and painstaking that must have been.

Bauby wanted to tell the story of how it felt to be so helpless. Paralysed from head to toe, but with his mind intact, he felt imprisoned inside his own body, only able to communicate through blinking his left eyelid. He had been the editor-in-chief of the French magazine *Elle* and he was the father of two young children. He now lay helplessly alive in the prison or tomb of his own body, like a diver encased in a diving bell.

Yet his spirit fought on and before he died he set up the Association of Locked-In-Syndrome, thereby offering hope to others like himself of escaping like a butterfly from whatever diving bell was imprisoning them.

Bauby's experience is extraordinary and his courage beyond most of us but in a sense we are all imprisoned in various forms whether it be by illness, by economic circumstances, psychologically, emotionally, by our past, by failed relationships and so forth. Today Jesus is calling us to believe in the Spirit who will enable us to emerge free and beautiful as a butterfly.

The resurrection is not just something left for the last day, for after our deaths. It is to be experienced now. In times of worry, despair, of fear and limitation Jesus wants us to pause for a while from our desperation and powerlessness and feel the power of the Spirit enabling us to live.

Bauby's situation mirrors that of the Jewish people in today's first reading from the prophet Ezekiel. Jerusalem had been destroyed; their much-loved Temple was in ruins; they had been in exile for decades, sitting and weeping by the rivers of Babylon, languishing in a foreign land. In the midst of their despair the prophet Ezekiel offers them hope, *The Lord says this, I am going to open your graves, my people, and lead you back to the soil of Israel.*

Similarly, in the Gospel, Jesus says of Lazarus, *Unbind him; let him go free.* Indirectly Jesus is speaking to us. He wants to unbind and free us from whatever imprisons us.

St Paul writing to the Christians in Rome in today's second reading reminds them *that he who raised Jesus from the dead will give life to your own mortal bodies through the Spirit living in you.* In one way or another we are all encased in a diving bell or a straight jacket waiting to be set free like a butterfly emerging from its cocoon.

Jesus' invitation to us today is to stop feeling sorry for ourselves, to give up our cynical despair and believe in the power of the Spirit

living in us to free us. The resurrection is not just for after our deaths. It is to be experienced today, even in our worst moments. We have to learn to have the courage to *roll back the stone*. In today's Gospel Martha, Mary and their friends were frightened of what horrible things they might see and smell when the stone was rolled back. In the same way we may be frightened to roll back the stones of our own fears, disappointments, frustrations, failures and losses. Do we believe that the Jesus who weeps with us will bring forth life from our tombs and prisons and enable us to plunge forth into life?

If we believe that Jesus weeps with us, as he did with Mary and Martha, we can grow in courage and hope and our spirits may grow stronger so that when we confront tensions and struggles that seem to overwhelm us, when we feel fearful and imprisoned, we may also feel the power of the Spirit of Jesus within us reminding us that he is *the resurrection and the life*.

AN EASTER SERMON

Easter Sunday, Year A

Delivered at St Kevin's, Eastwood, on 16 April 2017

A few years ago, I read a marvellous book by the then Anglican Bishop of Durham, Tom Wright, entitled *Surprised by Hope*. It was a book on what the resurrection meant to the early disciples in the decades immediately after Jesus.

The disciples had just been through the trauma of seeing Jesus die cruelly and their hopes were destroyed. They were wrestling with aloneness, desertion, betrayal, meaninglessness, shame, destroyed hopes and the problem of a seemingly absent God. Their friend, the one they put such trust in, was dead. They were asking themselves how can God be present in what we are enduring? Where is Jesus? What does he mean now?

Everything was dead: Jesus, their hopes, and their future and they were not expecting the Resurrection. For those Jews who did believe in the resurrection, it was to come at the end of time. So, the disciples were surprised when, through Jesus' appearances and through their sharing of their memories a wonderful thing happened, their hearts

began to burn within them and they realised that Jesus and his mission were not dead. The light had begun to shine again.

The disciples had been through a devastating experience. Not only had they watched their friend die but all their beliefs about God had been undermined. It was difficult to believe in a dead Messiah and they probably shared the understanding of God implicit in the mocking statement of those beneath the cross, 'You who would destroy the temple in three days, save yourself if you are the Son [and] come down from the cross!' (Matt 27:40) Like most of us they saw God as a God of power. Show us your power and prove you are God. Cardinal Kasper makes the telling point that Jesus proves he is God by not coming down from the cross. If he had have come down from the cross his whole life of compassion, siding with the poor, hope and love would have been shown to be meaningless. The only thing that would have mattered in the end would have been power. The powerful would have won again and what hope would there have been for the rest of us who cannot miraculously escape our tragedies and sufferings. Jesus shows us that God can be found on the cross, revealing that God suffers rather than inflict suffering, does not override human freedom, does not call on angels to change facts or rescue him. He does not overwhelm the world with any power except love.

The early Christians came to see Jesus' resurrection as his vindication. Through his death and resurrection Jesus had conquered the ultimate evil, death. His life had been a struggle against the powers of evil and now they were defeated, and the New Creation was beginning. By raising Jesus from the dead, the Father was acknowledging him as his Son and affirming his way of living as the way for all to live.

The Resurrection does not take away pain, betrayal and death but it enables us to face them. The suffering of Good Friday does not disappear in the delight of Easter Sunday.

In the Gospels, Jesus overcame death not by avoiding it but by the way he suffered with love and hope. We too must face our tragedies and respond courageously and positively to all the struggles and suffering that comes our way. Unfortunately, there is no pain free or failure free life and most of the time, God doesn't rescue us from our tragedies or magically help us to avoid the realities of life, but he does love and suffer with us.

His death and resurrection assure us that if we bravely, hopefully and lovingly face our suffering and death we too might find life where we could have reasonably expected to find death. Now that is a very hopeful surprise.

TO KNOW JESUS

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B

Delivered at St Kevin's, Eastwood, on 28 January 2018

There is a great irony in today's Gospel. It is an unclean spirit and not a disciple who recognises Jesus as the 'Holy One of God'. He is the first person in Mark's Gospel to do so. Why? We do not know. Perhaps it is because the disciples were concentrating more on what Jesus said whereas the unclean spirit concentrates on who Jesus is himself. You can talk forever about what Jesus said. It is quite different if you recognise who he is. In seeing Jesus, the man with the unclean spirit recognised God. For 2000 years now many Christians have concentrated on Jesus' teachings. We keep discussing them and learning our doctrine and while that is important the more important thing is to know Jesus as a person.

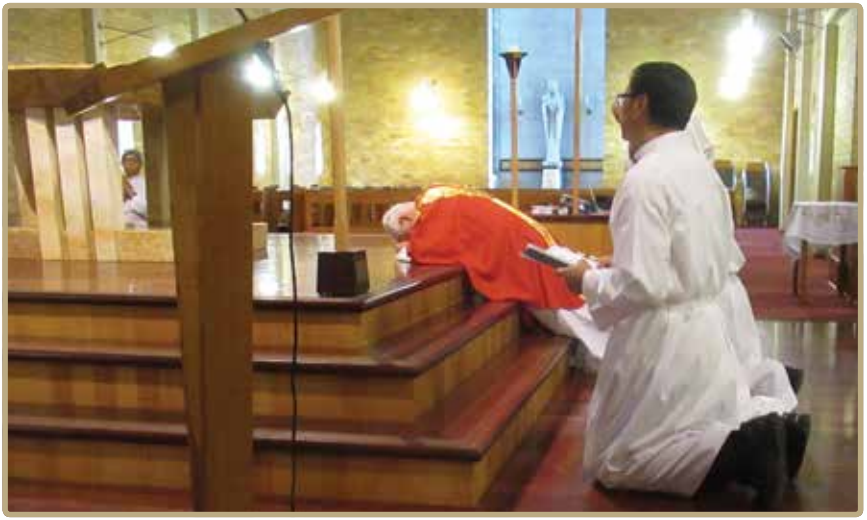
In a few homilies I have spoken about the Taoist holy man who told the Sister from Hong Kong that he believed we Christians know too much about God. She came to understand that while the Holy

Man respected Christians he felt that they are doctrine rich but contemplation poor. We knew a lot about God but did we know God? Sometimes we know so much there is hardly anything left to discover or to wonder about. The Taoist philosopher feared 'that so much knowledge will lessen the desire to stand before the mystery.'

This is a special danger for Westerners. We have a very verbal culture. We concentrate on pedagogy rather than mystery. We tend to undermine our liturgies and symbols by explaining them too much. We preach and teach thinking if only people understood then they would be converted. Yet we know deep inside it is the person of Jesus who fascinates and not doctrines about him. Christianity is caught not taught.

God is, as Rudolph Otto described, a *mysterium tremendens et fascinans*, a mystery that is both fascinating and awesome. It is the power of this mystery which gives life, which touches our heart and soul.

There tends to be too much information and talk in the modern Western world. Even in our prayers we talk too much trying to



impress God. Sometimes when we preach and teach, our words both hide the mystery from us and alienate our listeners who would be better encouraged by silence before the mystery and by sharing our deepest hopes.

That is why Mark says of Jesus that 'unlike the scribes, he made a deep impression on the people because he spoke with authority'. Jesus' had no degrees. He didn't give lectures or long detailed explanations of doctrine instead he told stories and spoke to the heart. His authority laid in the fact that his listeners knew that what he said was profoundly true and of God.

That is the challenge Pope Francis gave to priests when they preach. He challenged us to speak heart to heart. And it is a challenge to all Christians. We need to know Jesus deeply and personally, to know the mystery not just the doctrines and learn to share our hope with others in a way that our heart speaks to their heart.

DOES EVERYONE WHO ASKS, RECEIVES?

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

Delivered at St Kevin's, Eastwood, on 28 July 2019

In today's Gospel, Jesus promises us, 'For everyone who asks receives; everyone who searches finds; everyone who knocks will have the door opened.' This promise has given hope to millions who have prayed earnestly at times of sickness, death, family need etc. It has also caused many to worry and question because we all know from experience that many of our prayers seemingly go unanswered. I do not know the answer. Jesus sometimes does answer our prayers. Most of the time, Jesus does not rescue us for life or from our crises but loves us and gives us the courage and strength to survive.

When I read those lines from Luke, I always think of my mother. My mother had a stroke at the end of my second year in the seminary. She was paralysed down the right side of her body. She had to learn to do everything with her left hand and for things like sweeping she would hold the top of the broom to her chest with her incapacitated right arm and move the broom with her left. Although she was by nature, a pleasant, gentle person, she was also intelligent and strong and determined to look after her family. She lived for a further thirty-three years doing her best to care for me, my father, sister and brother.

But she took great hope in these words of Jesus, 'For everyone who asks receives; everyone who searches finds; everyone who knocks will have the door opened.' And she prayed daily for healing. She would occasionally say to me, 'John [I am called John at home] why won't Jesus hear me? I am not praying to win Lotto, or for a big house, or an overseas trip, or anything like that. I just want to be able to look after my family.'

I had no answer. However, she continued to pray for more than thirty years. She never got any movement back, but she continued to care for us, and she kept smiling and stayed gentle. So much so that when she was dying, and I would visit her in her ward in the hospital, the other women-patients would call me aside to tell me what a wonderful mother I had. Her prayers may not have transformed her body, but they did wonders for her spirit.

So I continue to believe Jesus when he says, 'For everyone who asks receives; everyone who searches finds; everyone who knocks

will have the door opened.' Sometimes our prayers are answered the way we want them to be. Sometimes we don't realise that the way we want things to turn out would be disastrous for us. However, always remembering Jesus in our need and trusting in him makes us more whole and wholesome people. What we can be assured of is that although our prayers may sometimes seemingly go unanswered, Jesus loves us more than we even love ourselves and he will be with us through everything.

I COME TO YOU IN WEAKNESS

(This was the final sermon that Fr Noel preached to the Chinese Catholic Community)

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A

Delivered at St Kevin's, Eastwood, on 9 February 2020

In today's second reading, Paul tells the Corinthians, 'I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling.' Well today, I come not with 'great fear and trembling' but certainly in physical weakness. Because of my cancer treatment, I have had two months of weakness. I do not like it, not only because of the suffering involved but also because I do not like being weak. I am used to being strong and successful. Now I cannot do many things I am used to doing, I have to slow down and I need the help of others.

I have preached many times how Jesus when he became man took on not only the wonderful, successful and noble aspects of being human but also our weakness, our struggles, our confusion and the things we wish to avoid in life. However, I do not think I really believed it or at least I did not fully appreciate it.

What I have learnt from being weak, is not just that I need help, but that people love me and want to help. Everywhere, from my brother

Columbans, from my family and friends, from my colleagues at Catholic Mission, from you, the Chinese community, and at Concord Hospital. I do not think I fully appreciated the love people have for me. That is why I tried to do things on my own. Two incidents brought this home to me. Firstly, my colleague, Lana Turvey Collins, the head of the Plenary Council Team, a very busy woman, offered to come with me to my Chemotherapy treatment. I normally go alone, which is fine as 'nothing' happens. However, she said she would come and sit and talk with me. I tried to be gracious in accepting. Since then someone from Catholic Mission often comes and sits with me. Secondly, once I was with some former Columban lay missionaries and clearly needed help but was trying to do something for myself, they said to me something I have thought about ever since, 'Noel, let us love you'.

To be weak is something that will come to all of us especially as we age. I do not like to think of myself as old, despite being 75. I am still working. However, I often think of a conversation I once had over a whiskey with an elderly Columban, he said to me, 'Noel, old age is not for the feint hearted.' Very true.

We need to be humble and confident enough to let people love us. We need to trust in God when we are weak, because being weak is also part of being human, part of the Incarnation, part of being like Jesus. We are not only like God when we are loving others. It is a beautiful thing to love. It is perhaps an even more gracious and beautiful thing to be loved. Then we are releasing the lover in others.

So today, like Paul, 'I come to you in weakness'. I apologise for being so personal and perhaps self-indulgent but it has been what I have been praying about these past weeks and I believe it might be useful for both the weak and strong among us as we try to be like God.

FR NOEL WRITES OF HIS EXPERIENCE OF CCC ON THE OCCASION OF ITS 35TH ANNIVERSARY

TO THE CHINESE COMMUNITY – SYDNEY

I am writing to congratulate you all on your 35th anniversary. I hope the Mass and meal are graced and enjoyable.

I am not sure how long I have been saying Masses at either Lindfield, North Parramatta, Camperdown or Eastwood. I began around 2003 because Father Cyril Hally convinced me to help out.

China is special for Columbans but it was especially important for Father Cyril. He often told me that it was stories about China that he heard from the Sisters in his primary school in Dunedin, New Zealand, that convinced him to become a Columban. We Columbans were founded by Bishop Edward Galvin for China. He was the first Bishop of Hanyang. Hanyang is now part of the city of Wuhan, the part between the Yangtze and Han Rivers. We will be celebrating our 100th anniversary of our founding next year, 2018.

Like Cyril, I dreamed of going to China but it wasn't possible in the 1970s. Still I will never forget the day I climbed the observation tower in Fanling, Hong Kong to look out over China for the first time. I was full of excitement at seeing a large country with such a rich culture and long history. So, it has also been exciting to work with a Chinese community.

I have always enjoyed the energy and devotion of your Masses and the meals both in the hall after Mass and during special celebrations. Unfortunately, they haven't helped me to stay trim and taut.

The weeks I am on Mass for the community I normally regret having to write my homily in advance. But it has been a good discipline. I like teaching and preaching and I think writing them early has normally meant a better homily. At least I hope so.

Finally, as I have said many times before, the thing I admire most about your community is that it is lay run. I believe that is the strength of the CCC. It has meant that many people have served in leadership and it has also ensured that it is "your church". We priests are invited to serve you but we do not run the community. That is unique. It is a wonderful tribute to you that you have could keep the Chinese Catholic Community alive and vibrant for so long.

Congratulations to you all. I wish the Community and you all individually a long, happy and graced future.

Peace,

Noel Connolly

Vale, Fr Noel

Vale, my dear friend
To the comfort of His arms
Your earthly walk now ends
Freed of sorrow, pain and harm

The gifts you left us to keep
In love, sadness and laughter
As the pastor for us sheep
Whose lead we'll follow after

These memories, we'll treasure
We send our love for you
Which we cannot measure
A task only God can do

The heavenly journey begun
Lord, as You have wished
'Let your will be done'
Father, you'll be missed

IVY KWAN

I have fought the good fight.
I have finished the race,
I have kept the faith.

(2 Timothy 4:7).

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