Homily at Funeral Mass for Brother Mark Fitzpatrick

My Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We have come to Mass here in Turners Cross Church this morning to remember Brother Denis Mark Fitzpatrick from Ballingarry Co. Limerick who lived his vocation as a Presentation Brother with extraordinary commitment until he slipped away gently to his heavenly reward on Tuesday afternoon, at Farranlea Community Nursing Unit, Farranlea Road, Wilton, Cork.

We are here to express our sadness, knowing that none of us will be welcomed by his warm smile when we visited him either in the nursing home or in Maiville where he resided before going to Farranlea Community Nursing Unit. We are here to give thanks for having known him and been influenced by this remarkable man. It allows us to reflect on his values and the Catholic faith that gave him the energy to be a true follower of Christ until he breathed his last on Tuesday afternoon. Brother Mark was in his 87th year.

Denis Fitzpatrick life journey began in 1935 in the townland of Lauragh and later in Ballingarry. He was the youngest of six children, and it was in this family home that he learned the love, generosity and commitment that we associated with him. He got his foundation of his Catholic faith from his parents, Mary and Denis, which he treasured. They passed on to him the traditions and values that moulded him into the person that we know as Mark.

He came to Cork in 1949 and started his secondary education at Coláiste Muire, Douglas. Having completed his Leaving Cert, he entered the Novitiate in Mount Saint Joseph in 1952, where he will be laid to rest this morning.

In 1954 Mark was sent to Canada as a novice, he took his first vows in Longueuil and shortly after that he was transferred to the community in Montreal where he started teaching at Luke Callaghan School. In 1957 Mark taught at St. Aloysius School Montreal until 1960. In the summer of 1960 Mark was transferred back to Longueuil where he taught at Presentation School and St. Jude. In 1962 Mark was transferred back to the community in Montreal and taught at Daniel O’Connell School until 1968. In 1966 Brother Mark graduated with his BA from Ottawa University.

Mark taught in two other schools and there were Sacred Heart School in British Columbia (1968 -1972) and Verdun Catholic School from 1972 to his retirement from teaching in 1995.

Brother Mark held the post of a community leader in several communities during his 47 years in Canada. He was appointed to the Province Leadership team in 1974 and in 1976 he was appointed Province Leader to 1984. He was then again appointed to the Province Leadership Team for a further six years.

Brother Mark returned to Ireland in 2001 and resided in the Glasthule Community. In 2013 he then moved to Maiville where lived until 2015, he then moved to the Farranlea Community nursing unit to live out his retirement.

Brother Mark had a great devotion to Our Lady; he was very active in the Legion of Mary, and he was spiritual director to different Legion of Mary groups during his lifetime.

As I reflect on the life of Brother Mark, the image that comes to me is of a man who embraced all that nature could give us, especial during the liturgical seasons. We are nearing the end of the Advent season where we are waiting for the birth of the child Jesus. Mark was a man for all seasons; he moved on quietly to God during this special time for the church.

The first reading from the Book of Ecclesiastes reminds us that:

There is a time for giving birth and a time for dying,

A time for laughter and a time for mourning.

The image of the Ascension of Jesus to heaven surrounded by those gone before him gives us the hope that those who have gone before us will be there waiting for us. So, we are on this earth for a period but we must move on to be with the Father. We are told there are different times in our lives; these are positive and negative; they go hand in hand. Mark lived his life to the full, knowing that he would one day join Jesus because he believed that Jesus is “the way, the truth and the life”. Mark always put Jesus first; he was a man of prayer, he saw Jesus in all human life. He had a heart of gold especially to those who called to the community looking for help.

In our Second Reading St. Paul writes that ‘the life and death of each of us has its influence on others; if we live we live for the Lord; if we die, we die for the Lord, so that alive or dead we belong to the Lord.’ These lines could be written about Brother Mark.

We thank God for the positive influence he had on the lives of the children he educated and the young men he formed during his time as an excellent teacher. His past students went on to excel in various walks of life and witnessed to the Christian values that Brother Mark instilled in them. These words from Brother Henry Spencer which I received, sums up Br. Mark; “Mark was a true and loyal friend, kind and gentle, his kind and gentle manner endeared him to us all and indeed the congregation has lost a true gentleman of the Presentation”.

Before I conclude:

I want to take this opportunity on behalf of the Province Leadership Team and the Brothers who live in the Maiville community to sincerely thank the Staff at Farranlea Community Nursing unit who looked after Br. Mark over the pasted number of years. The professionalism and caring nature that you showed Br. Mark is very much appreciated. I want to also sincerely thank the Brothers and Staff of the Maiville community for the support they gave to Mark; especially on the days, he would come to visit the community.

And as I conclude

We all thank God today for this gifted man from Milford/Ballingarry, whom we were privileged to know at some time over the years. We all have different memories of Brother Mark: mine would be a man of humility and understanding and he would want me to conclude this homily by thanking all of you for praying for him and with him this morning.

Ar dheis Dé go Raibh a anam.