

## Funeral Mass for Denis Kelly

It is an honour – a sad honour – to be able to celebrate mass for Denis. A fine man, a gentleman to say the very least, and of course a committed and dedicated member of this parish for many years.

To his family and loved ones, our sympathy and prayerful support goes out to you at this time as you remember Denis with love and gratitude as we commend him to the loving mercy of God in heaven.

“And eternal life is this: to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent...” this text from scripture is written on the heart of every Salvatorian priest throughout the world, it’s the very text which motivated the soon-to-be Blessed Francis Jordan to establish the Salvatorian Order back in 1881. And we hear the same words today at this funeral, quite fittingly so, because Denis shared in the mission of the Salvatorian Order by way of his faith and his dedication to this parish.

Denis, alongside many others of this parish, was passionate about being the goodness and kindness of our Divine Saviour, most especially in and through the support of our mission projects in Tanzania and other places. His assistance and wise counsel in all matters parochial to Fathers Des and Terry, to Father Floribert, myself and Father Richard was invaluable; his gentle approach and demeanour was consistent and he always had a smile to go with it too, even when Watford lost.

Today there is sadness because we’re saying farewell to Denis much before his time, and after a time of cruel illness, but amidst our sadness there is, I’m sure, joy and gratitude. Joy because he’s now in the presence of his Heavenly Father, and gratitude for having been blessed to have known and loved Denis, to be known and loved by him, and, of course, gratitude for all that was good in his life – and there is much to be thankful for in this regard! I’m sure this will be elaborated upon tomorrow when the family tribute is shared.

The Gospel speaks to us of “eternal life”... and you know, I think sometimes we can misunderstand a little what this gift of eternal life actually means. Yes, of course it speaks to us of the realm of eternity, but to limit it to that is to reduce it to something we only experience when we die.

Eternal life is not just about heaven, harps and halos, angels and saints, it's about much more. Eternal life is about knowing and experiencing God. Eternal life is about knowing and experiencing God in such a powerful way that you realise that you are a part of something much bigger than yourself. Eternal life is about knowing and experiencing God in such a powerful way that you realise that knowledge and experience will transcend your death.

Think of the story of Simeon in the temple when he holds our Blessed Lord in his arms and praised God: Now, Lord you let your servant go in peace, your word has been fulfilled, because my own eyes have seen the very salvation you have prepared for your people...” As Simeon holds Jesus in his arms he knows and experiences God... he understood that God's promise of eternal life is true and very present in reality. He sees and holds God's promise in his hands, he touches and feels the promise of eternal life which God gives through Jesus Christ, and Simeon realises that this experience and knowledge of God is powerful that it will transcend his death, and so he prays: now, Lord you let your servant go in peace....

Eternal life is all around us. Every day of our lives presents us with special moments of grace to know God and experience eternal life in the here and now. We give thanks for the gift of eternal life Denis experienced in his life: though his loving family, his friends, his faith; for the gift of eternal life we experienced through knowing Denis: his goodness, his love, his faith, his charity, his very character, the list is endless.

When the family tribute is delivered tomorrow, I hope and trust that you will see and understand much more clearly that eternal life really is experienced in the here and now, in the world around us, in and through the lives of wonderful people like Denis. The possibilities are endless, even in the midst of a world that can seem so wrong and painful, we simply need to be ready and open to the experiences of eternal life that will break in at the most surprising times.

We don't have to wait for death to experience eternal life, we experience it all the time in the world and the people around us. Denis experienced eternal life throughout many blessed moments and times of grace during his life. Now, he experiences eternal life in a new way, in the immediate presence of the Eternal Father himself. Now he knows what it really is all about, and now it's his turn to be rewarded for his goodness and love, for all those times in his life he allowed eternal life to be seen in and through him.

Denis was blessed to be surrounded by his loving family right up to the end, he was fortified by the last sacraments of the Church; he went to the Lord well prepared and surrounded with love and many prayers. Today our love and our prayers go with him and remain with him; our love and our prayers in this mass surround him as he is carried home in the arms of the Good Shepherd to be at peace with the Father in heaven.

Denis, may you hear the blessed words of God spoken to you as you see him face to face: Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the Joy of your Lord...