

A Farewell to Fr Michael or Until we meet again.

The Lord's unending day is dawning our banner proclaims. For Fr Michael that **unending day** has dawned – he is experiencing the day of resurrection. What **he** would say, of course, is that he has made his final journey. And, as in life, now in death he will continue to inspire us, cajole us if necessary, to continue our journey of faith and love. - - - **We have** just celebrated **Gaudete**, “Rejoicing”, Sunday and can't but see his joyful, smiling face every time the word **JOY** is spoken. He was the Archetype Messenger of Joy, of Good News, to so many people - because Joy and Good News was the *raison d'être* and object of his ministry. Michael was one of the best in fulfilling that mission and a true instrument of Christ in the world. Our founder, Fr Emmanuel d'Alzon, is filled with joy in welcoming home one of his sons, a son of whom he is so, so proud. The Assumptionist Motto and our Mission Statement applies to every Christian. It comes from the Lord's Prayer: **Thy Kingdom Come**, *Adveniat Regnum Tuum*, to which is added “**Because of our love of Jesus Christ.**” All the tributes that have been given of Fr Michael since his death by word of mouth and by written word, especially yesterday evening, clearly show that wherever Michael walked – and you all know he did a lot of walking (being a 20,000 steps-a-day man) – wherever his feet touched the ground, the holiness of the Kingdom, which we call the Reign of God, was sown and spread. Not only with **his steps** but with the steps of all those with whom he walked: parishioners, non-parishioners, people in need, fellow priests, the ministers and brethren of all the churches in Hitchin and beyond. The many, who with him, helped make Hitchin a Holy Place and, in their own special way a distinctive model of the Kingdom! - - - **Like Jesus**, Michael never wanted to be alone in his mission because the kingdom was something shared and shared with everyone. He believed it was a kingdom where all were welcome, all could find friendship and respect. Where people are welcomed with reverence and dignity, and knew they belonged and were of unique value. A Kingdom all are invited to call: HOME.

If you stop and reflect, am I not really speaking about Jesus who wants everyone to belong and experience the great love of the Father and the hope-filled support and strength of the Spirit? **If** it was Michael's mission, then isn't it our mission too? Not just to bring Christ to the world but to **be Christ** to the world. Yes, God took flesh in Jesus Christ and continues to take flesh and renew his presence in us, as he does every Christmas. Jesus once told us that we would do even greater things than he did. If ever we need proof of that, then Fr Michael is our proof.

One of the great things about Michael is that he wasn't perfect and he knew it. When people corrected him, he took the correction on board and had the humility to address it and, when necessary, change. Today, the inspirational part of his message is that he makes it clear that we do not have to be perfect to do great things for God!! As Fr Euloge said in his homily yesterday, we are called to smile at everyone we meet. The smile opens the doors to people's hearts, **doors** that allow Christ to enter in. Michael's smile is what has brought you here today. He shows us that, what is possible for him is possible for us too. Isn't that why we love him so much?

As many of you know, Fr Michael always wanted to encourage us to use our **gifts and talents** because in using them we are brought closer to their source: to God. In using them, they help us discover how God is actively present in our lives and in our world. They also help

others discover their abilities and talents and use them in a similar way to help others. Fr Michael was so good at that. He fostered, nurtured and, at times, gently bullied people into taking on roles they were afraid to accept. The great deal of trust and belief he showed in people brought out the best in them. Once again, I am beginning to think that I am speaking about Jesus rather than speaking about Fr Michael??

We heard about the many rooms in the house of the Father. Rest assured that Michael is up there now organising and arranging things, getting rid of clutter and putting everything in its right place - something he was so good at. He applied that ability to the liturgy of which we was very proud believing it to be the prime source of the community giving glory to God. The reason he was upset if something was out of place, or some small thing was missing, was because everything, even the small things in the liturgy, had an importance and a value that deserved respect and reverence – and that was precisely the way he served people through whom he also gave glory to God. . . . **Some** would say he was proud, even a little too proud. **He was.** He was proud to be able to serve God as an Assumptionist and as a priest. Proud that he could bring Christ to people in communion, in the sacraments, and in all his forms of service. Proud of the God he wished to reflect in his life.

Fr Michael chose the reading about banquets, and is probably at one now. He's already won everybody over to having the best ice-cream deserts ever and is telling them which wine to serve at which meal!! I even believe he has introduced tea and cake at 4 o'clock!! But, **Banquet** for him was about the people present as well as the good wine and good food. He will have no better company now than at the heavenly banquet. Michael believed that life was meant to be joyfully lived. He knew that life was the best of all God's gifts and it needed to be celebrated at every opportunity. And he did!

His great gift was that of building community. The Parish here is testimony to that. Look at the numbers here present today. As with all things, Michael saw broad and large. . . far beyond the norm. Community, for him, included all the churches and faith groups in the vicinity and he became a catalyst that drew people of faith and of none together, creating a feeling that all, without exception, were welcome. More recently, he was proactive in seeking ways for those who may have felt excluded in the past to feel welcome; not because we might be able to help them, but because we lack the richness and blessings that they have to offer. I am referring particularly to those who come under the umbrella of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and those Questioning their gender. Michael believed, rightly so, that the community was missing something of importance without their valued presence. Michael didn't just believe **All are Welcome**, he wanted their **presence**. He wanted the community to be a family, to be a home for all, and thus echo the message of Jesus who died and rose again that all might know and believe that they are children of God.

In the stories you tell about Michael, know that he will be present; that the blessings, goodness and love he gave you in life, he will give to you anew, each time you tell them. And, be attentive to the fact that you will also be talking about Jesus, about the Good News of Salvation, about the Kingdom of God, **about the Lord's unending day.**

Jesus said: *"If you have seen me, you have seen the father."*

Those of us who have seen Michael have seen Christ!!