

FUNERAL MASS FOR BOB BARBER SM

5 March 2021

Extracts from Peter McMurrich's Eulogy

In the years after ordination Bob fitted in an amazing list of challenging appointments: 10 years in the school apostolate at Bellambi and Woodlawn, 6 years working with the Marist Brothers in Nairobi, 9 years with the Marist Fathers' District of Africa as a formator, 3 years in aboriginal ministry at Macksville, 12 years in Provincial administration firstly as vicar-provincial and then as Provincial, and two years at St Patrick's, Church Hill. He was about to begin a new appointment as a school chaplain in Lismore when he was admitted to hospital there, and died suddenly several days later.

Bob brought to the Provincial's job a great love and appreciation for his confreres, for the members of the Province. And I know that some of the hardest things that Bob had to do as Provincial were concerned with situations where he had to meet with a confrere in a situation of conflict, or bring some festering situation to a head. And temperamentally those encounters were very hard for Bob but he never shirked them and always tried to do what he had to do in a way that was least difficult and hurtful for the confrere involved. One Marist who had to meet on a number of occasions with Bob about something very confronting said to me a year or two back that Bob was the best Provincial he'd ever known, and I'm sure he said that because he picked up that within the difficult context of the matter at hand, he could see how much Bob cared about him.

These are difficult times for the Church, for the Society of Mary throughout the world, for our shrinking Australian Province. If you're in leadership in these times you don't get the chance to kick too many goals. One churchman from a southern state was once quoted as saying it was like your side was 10 goals behind in the last quarter, and kicking into a howling wind. Bob when Provincial always tried to be positive and hopeful, and he expressed that in a wonderful way in his pieces in the Provincial Circular, which were absolutely authentic and genuine, and tremendously encouraging.

Bob was universally liked and admired in the Province and wherever he went. He was absolutely authentic, generous, and wholeheartedly committed to whatever he undertook; he had the legendary heart of gold. He was unpretentious, lived simply, and was genuinely detached from the trappings of the consumer society. Bob was a great community man, and always put in and participated. He instinctively supported the underdog against the privileged and the powerful, both within the Society of Mary and in society in general.

The outpouring of tributes to Bob which have followed his death has been quite extraordinary. Bob's life and death has clearly deeply touched a great range of people. Many spoke of his genuineness and authenticity. Bob modelled a different way of being a priest. It was the exact opposite of the formal cleric dressed up in black. Bob's style said to people "You can still be human and close to God".

Farewell and Peace be with you, mate, brother, and friend. You have fought the good fight and you have run the race. May yours be the peace of the kingdom forever.