MICHAEL ASHLEY MULLINS SM

 FUNERAL MASS – HOMILY

Michael Ashley Mullins was born during the early years of WW11. Michael was named after the Archangel Michael the Parton Saint of soldiers and Ashley after his mother’s maiden name. At the beginning of the War, his father, Major Mullins was stationed in North Africa when the Australian troops were recalled to the Asia-Pacific theatre of war. He was captured in Borneo by the Japanese and was taken to the Changi Prison in Singapore where he discovered that two brothers in law were in residence.

Major Mullins was an engineer and was soon deplored by the Japanese to work on the notorious Burma Railway. It would be five years before father and son were to meet each other. During this time Michael grew up under the tender care of five women – Mother, Grandmother and Aunts.

As a clinical psychologist, one of Michael’s guiding principles was that if you want to understand a person, you need first of all to understand their family of origin. I will dare to make a couple of observations concerning Michael.

From his father, Michael was blessed with the gift of courage to face difficult and challenging situations. He was ready - willing – and able to fire a ‘shot’ if and when required and sometimes even - when not required.

From his mother, Grandmother and Aunts, Michael was blessed with the gift of compassion and the valuing of friendships and relationships. Michael took great care to connect with family and friends throughout his life.

Michael himself brought to the table his gift of professionalism. A significant influence on his life were his studies at the East Asian Pastoral Institute in Manila and the Tavistock Institute in England. He especially valued his local and international network of many professional colleagues.

These gifts of courage, compassion and professionalism shaped Michael’s ministry as a Marist.

Michael spent a number of years teaching at Woodlawn, Geelong and Bellambi. From the people of Bellambi at St. Pauls College and later at Catholic Care in Woolongong, Michael gained a deep appreciation of the role of women and men in the life and ministry of the church.

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As Superior of the Marist Formation Program here at Hunters Hill for around 10 years – Michael, with the participation of other Religious Institutes and Ecumenical Colleges, transformed the academic program into the Catholic Theological College that was to become part of the Sydney College of Divinity -as a degree granting body. This was formation for mission for women and men, lay, religious and clerical students – together. The key to the program was the integration of four foundational principles, namely – intellectual, human, pastoral and spiritual formation.

RPD – or Refounding Pastoral Development was the coming together of the expertise of Marist priest Gerald Arbuckle, Cultural Anthropologist and Michael Mullins as the practioner. The primary task of RPD was as the name suggests – how to engage church leaders in refounding the pastoral mission of the church. This work involved Gerald principally in lecturing in the USA and writing books. For Michael this involved the Facilitation of General Chapters and the Supervision of Leadership Teams and leaders both in Australia and overseas – especially for our Marist Society. This ministry extended for over 30 years.

One significant aspect of this ministry was his involvement in what is known as - Professional Standards – namely, a compassionate and ethical response to the issue of Sexual Abuse in the Church. Michael listened to and guided survivors of abuse, offenders of abuse and family members affected by the impact of sexual abuse. He supported leaders and leadership teams of religious and other Catholic organisations in developing a professional response to this painful issue in the church. Michael developed a network of professional colleagues in Rome, Europe and the UK in guiding his own responses to this complex issue.

Michael was actively involved with the leadership of the Marist Fathers here in Australia and overseas. One significant project was his role in establishing an Aged Care Committee for our Marist Province and then together with Garry Reynolds and professional colleagues in the design and development of the Montbel Aged Care Facility for Marists. This is the building where you will have refreshments later today.

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We are all familiar with today’s gospel where two of the disciples were leaving Jerusalem following the crucifixion of Jesus and the scandal of the cross. They were full of fear and had lost hope in the promises of Jesus. They were leaving town but on the way to Emmaus their eyes were opened by Jesus at the breaking of the bread.

There is a different cross in our church in our time - especially around the issues of – authority, leadership, sexuality and the participation of women and men in life of the church. Michael had the courage, compassion and professionalism to respond to these issues in a very pastoral way.

Due to the confidential nature of his work most of his ministry was simply hidden and unknown. However, his eyes and heart were open to the call of the Spirit. One of his mottos was a line from the poet Dante: ‘In His Will is our Peace’. His was truly a Marist ministry.

Living and working with Michael over the years I noticed that he had some unusual habits – one was that he would occasionally voice words out aloud – like a cry from deep within - dare I suggest - deep from his unconscious. As he was peeling a potato or washing the dishes in the kitchen – I would hear a voice proclaim out aloud – ‘unbelievable’ – perhaps reflecting the painful issues he was confronting in his ministry each day – and the other was - ‘the Gospel of Christ’. I suggest that this was his primary task – and for this we are most grateful. May he rest in the peace of our Risen Lord. Amen.

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