

JOHN'S FINAL 11am MASS...THANK YOU FROM THE PARISH October 30, 2016

I'm not sure that any of us can really believe that today has finally arrived...least of all you John. It is hard to stand before everyone here today and try to find the words that come close to expressing our love and gratitude to you. It's a day of mixed emotions for us all as we reflect on the extraordinary experience we have shared with you during your time at St Declan's. It's a time to celebrate the Spirit of welcome, love, energy and faith you have nourished through your ministry. Today is also a time of great sadness as we say goodbye to our much loved friend and pastor.

I feel very humbled to be asked as a representative of the parish council to say a few words of thanks to you on behalf of the parish, and accepting this request was not something I took lightly. How can one person speak on behalf of so many people and do justice to the many individual ways you have touched our lives? There are people who have lived their whole life in this parish; generations of families who are part of the very foundation of St Declan's; people from many different ethnic origins who have found a warm welcome here and enhanced our community through their presence; people who cannot be here today for reasons of age, infirmity or distance but are truly valuable members of the parish family. So my words are spoken from my heart on behalf of everyone.

We are so grateful to you John for the endless service and love which flows through your leadership. Your ministry to everyone has never failed to provide opportunities to open our hearts to God and find ways to become active and nourished in our faith. You have always treated everyone equally with kindness, concern and respect. You have often described yourself as just a simple parish priest "here to serve not to be served" and we have experienced this in your ministry to everyone without distinction.

You have always put the needs of people ahead of rules or restrictions that make things harder for people...You say, "here at St Declan's we make things easier for people...everyone is doing the best they can with what they have"...you see goodness in people and always show tolerance, compassion and genuine interest in our lives. You don't just know our names...you know who we are, you care how we are going and you have generously shared yourself and your own story with us. You have always made time for everyone when they have called on you for help. None of us can understand how you could fit so much in your days...day after day, week after week...stretching your time endlessly to help anyone in need. Is it any wonder the Missionaries of God's Love will be bringing four young priests to take on your workload?

We have all been inspired at your courage John...to never allow church politics to come ahead of people...you always ask what would Jesus say or do...and then this is how you speak and act. Your life is guided by the words and actions of Jesus...and day after day you share your understanding and love of Jesus with us through who you are. We see this constantly through the Gospels...and we have experienced this through your ministry. We thank you for your recognition and support of women in ministry within the church, and your hope for equality for everyone in the church to reflect the message of Jesus. You welcome everyone to come as they are; you provide healing and a sanctuary for the broken, the lost, and anyone who feels alienated from the church. No one has ever been turned away.

Your homilies have been incredible as you shared your insight of the message of Jesus and shared your profound faith and knowledge of the Gospels in a way that has made so much sense and spoken to our hearts. We will always remember your homilies. You have constantly taught us that our faith is all about relationships and have helped all of us to recognise and improve the relationships we have with God, our families and each other in the parish. You challenge us to reflect on the message of Jesus, to think about our faith, to grow in our relationship with Jesus.

You tell us that you are not special, but everything about you is indeed very special. We thank you for teaching us of the importance of reconciling with each other, and of the unconditional and infinite mercy and forgiveness of God. We thank you for praying with us, for your love of celebrating Mass with us. We have often heard you use the phrase...‘all of us in this together’...and it is a philosophy you follow in your ministry as you avoid clericalism in any form. We thank you for your passion and support for our schools and the transformation of Marist Catholic College to become coeducational. The presence of girls at Marist has brought balance and enriched and enhanced the school community.

You have inspired us with your faith John, but you have also inspired us through the balance you have in your life. You never put yourself ahead of anyone else and we love how you are such a normal, down to earth person. We will always remember your love of music, your passion for tennis, your hospitality and enjoyment in sharing a meal or a drink with us as your friends. Thank you for allowing us to show our love and care for you over the years. This has allowed a wonderful relationship of trust and friendship to enrich all of us. Thank you for the concern you had for our future when the time was coming for you to leave our parish. Thank you for taking the time to welcome our new Parish Priest to stand side by side with you in Mass to feel welcome and know he will find a great home for his faith in our community.

In everything you do John you have shown courage, integrity, compassion and a strong sense of social justice. I'm sure you have found John, saying goodbye is the hardest thing to do.....but we all understand the time is right for you to continue on your own faith journey after so many years of walking with us on ours. You tell us the only constant in life is change...thank you for being the constant in our lives and for the way this has changed us. Each of us is a better person for having known you and as you leave the parish we give you our love, prayers and thanks for your amazing pastoral leadership, your friendship and faith and for truly bringing the presence of Jesus into our lives.

Please accept this parish card and gift from our heart to yours.

Monica Hayes