**Homily Preached at the Requiem Mass for Fr. Donal O Leary**

By Canon John Nunan

I am humbled and honoured to have been invited to speak to you,

about the life, ministry and vision of Donal O’Leary…..Priest and Prophet

On his ordination day 19th June 1960 when Donal was just 23, the Bishop addressed Donal in these words: *“Share with mankind the word of God you have received with joy…..*

*Teach what you believe……Put into practice what you teach.”*

He did precisely that for the past 60 years with enormous energy and enthusiasm. The readings you have heard were central to his ministry and his vision. He was focused on the mystery of the Incarnation and our sharing in life of the Trinity. *1 John 1.3 sums it up in these words*: *“Our life is shared with the Father and with his son Jesus Christ.* *We are writing this to you so that your joy may be complete.”*

Donal always said: “Begin with the heart.” In a nutshell if my understanding is correct, it is this: if we come home to ourselves, if we listen with the ears of our hearts, we will find God’s Spirit living in us. Then will experience the love and presence of God. When we experience God’s Presence in our hearts, we will be transformed an our Joy will be complete.

That was Donal’s message. That was the message of St. Benedict. That the message stated clearly in First Commandment: *“Listen Israel, the Lord your God is one Lord.”* It is vital to remember that we are called to listen with our whole being. Head and heart.

That was the message of Jesus when he said: “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart…with all your mind, with all your will.” We are called to listen with our whole selves.

Donal often said that it is in the messiness and struggles of life that we find God. Over the past challenging months Donal struggled to face his mortality. Despite his deep spirituality he questioned. He experienced the dark night of the soul. As he came to grips with the reality his faith grew. In the end he could say to his friend Fr. Jim Leavy: “I know there is something beautiful waiting for me.”

When I heard that I thought of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane: *“Father, if it be possible let this cross pass from me. Not my will but thine be done.”*

One of Donal’s many gifts was his total honesty, his authenticity. He was able to share his own humanity and his own inner struggles because he understood himself. He could relate in a meaningful way to others in their search and in their struggles. Some found his honesty challenging.

Donal believed that God calls each of us to be “*free and authentic human beings……”*

Donal was both.

He brought his honesty and integrity to his ministry which included 30 years in Parish Ministry, 25 years in Strawberry Hill preparing Catholic teachers for their ministry.

He served for 10 years as Episcopal Vicar for Christian Formation. While doing all this he was in constant demand to give retreats nationally and internationally. All the time reading, writing, listening. He had the gift of listening with his whole being.

**Garforth**

He was an inspirational Parish Priest in Garforth and Ripon. He created vibrant ministering communities in the Spirit of Vatican II. He empowered people to recognise their gifts, to develop their gifts and to use them to build up the body of Christ.

**Books**

While doing all this he somehow got time to write some 20 books. His ministry will live on.

We thank the O Leary Family and the Parish of Rathmore for giving him to us. We are all formed by our families and communities. Donal came from a close, loving family. His father, Joe came from a long line of teachers…..teaching. His mother Margaret came from farming stock. Donal was one of four children. Michael and Maura are here. Joseph had Downs’s syndrome — he is in heaven. Donal often spoke of Joseph, of how much Joseph taught him. Joseph taught him the importance on the heart and the important things in life.

Rathmore is vibrant place renowned for its natural beauty, renowned for its music, song and story and deep Celtic spirituality. Donal grew up in shadow of the Kerry Paps, which were dedicated to the great Mother Goddess Danu, after whom the River Danube is named.

Its spirituality goes back beyond Christian times to the Tuaha de Dannan.

Rathmore has served the Church and the world well. In the last century it has provided over 100 priest and nuns. It provided doctors, nurses, civil engineers, physicists. Great literary people Aoghan O Rahilly, Eoin Rua O Suilabhain, Bernard O Donohue Emeritus Professor of Medieval English at Oxford who was a friend and contemporary of Donal.

Donal was ordained just after Vatican II was announced in by Pope John XXIII in 1959,

60 years ago this year. Donal knew the oppressiveness of the pre-Vatican II Church.

So did I! I am amazed that some people who never knew it want to go back to it.

Donal embraced the excitement, the vision, the hope and possibilities that the Council brought. Donal was a Vatican II priest who worker all his life to implement its teaching.

He was always a faithful and loyal servant of teachings of our Church. He felt very disappointed that it has not been fully implemented. He was saddened to see people walking away from the Church he loved. Donal accepted the reality that the institutional Church was becoming increasingly irrelevant to the lives and struggles of ordinary people in the postmodern world.

Donal grew up in the stifling pre-Vatican II Church. He was well aware that there is no future in the past. He hoped for a new beginning. Pope Francis affirmed that hope.

Donal dreamt of a Church that would listen. He dreamt of a Church that would minister as Jesus ministered. Jesus ministered from a position of vulnerability.

Do you remember what happened at the well?

Jesus is tired and weary sitting near the well……

The woman came…..

He asked her to minister to him…..

And then he ministered to her…….

He met her where she was…...

And he called her forward…….

We should not forget that………….

It is about service from below up……

Donal ministered as Jesus ministered.

Donal had a vision for the future. He laid it out in his book *Passion for the Possible* which was published in 1998 almost 21 years ago. He writes about the “possibility of a brave new beginning for the Church starting with the spirituality of the heart.”

This is a quote from *Passion for the Possible:* *“The desperate situation we are is due to* *institutionalism and clericalism*, *triumphalist attitudes and self-centred emphasis,* *and the terrible focus on fear and judgement*. *This needs to replaced by a more positive creation centred theology and spirituality, and a more life affirming belief in the unconditional loving and compassionate God.”*

Donal was born three weeks before Pope Francis, 82years ago. They were similar — of the same age and the same mind. They belong.

I have given Donal’s analysis and vision which he gave in 1998. Now can I give you what Christ’s Vicar on Earth has to say. On the 13 December 2016 Pope Francis said: “The spirit of Clericalism is an evil in the Church to-day.” He has repeated that message many times since. In his letter to the people of God on abuse in the Church given 20 August 2018 Pope Francis said: *“It is impossible to think of a conversion of our activity as a Church, that does not include the active participation of all God’s people*. *Clericalism, whether fostered by priests themselves or lay persons,* *leads to an excision in the ecclesial body that supports and helps to perpetuate many of the evils we are condemning to-day.* *To say no to abuse is to say an emphatic no to all forms of clericalism.”*

Let us pray the Synod of Bishops taking place next month will be the beginning of the new beginning that Daniel hoped for.

I asked my friend Ann Woodhouse whose spiritual life was enriched by his writings what she thought of him. “I met Daniel only once. I was already familiar with his writing and a regular visitor to his website. It was at the Advent retreat at the Briery in 2016. From the moment I arrived I was struck by his presence. He was of athletic build and he blended quietly and modestly into the assembled company but as soon as he spoke and when he looked at you,

his kindness, empathy and intellect were palpable.

He struck me as a very sensitive vulnerable man who readily shared stories of his own imperfections and failings. Daniel was not remotely sanctimonious and was quick to laugh with himself and include humorous anecdotes when appropriate. The people taking part were all there because they were admirers of his work, but he remained a man of great humility with no trace of pride or arrogance. The only time I saw him wearing clerical vestments was when he celebrated Mass. He seemed to me to personify the antithesis of clericalism while preserving the dignity of the priesthood.”

Let us give thanks to God for Donal O’Leary, a prophet for our time.