

The Rt Reverend Dom Kenneth Newing OSB

The Rt Reverend Dom Kenneth OSB died very peacefully on 15th May 2019, aged 95. He was a member of the Community at St Benedict's Priory in the Cathedral Close at Salisbury and Shirley Talbot and I attended the Requiem Mass in the Cathedral on Tuesday, 11th June. After the service we were delighted to be able to join the monks of St Benedict's and many other people who had come to pay their respects to Dom Kenneth, at Sarum College.

Dom Kenneth, who was formerly the Bishop of Plymouth, was a close friend of Father Ronnie Cox and in the summer of 1986, the two of them visited the Diocese of Masasi, accompanied by a young Patrick Mwachiko who had been staying with Father Cox for several months while preparing to enter the priesthood.

It was as a result of this visit that Father Cox's dream of establishing a Charitable Trust to support the people of Masasi became a reality and the Trustees of the Friends of Masasi and the Diocese of Masasi owe a great debt to Dom Kenneth for his generosity and support.

In 1988 Bishop Kenneth resigned his post as Bishop of Plymouth and joined the Order of St Benedictine at Elmore Abbey and later moved with them to St Benedict's Priory in Salisbury, where in his later years he was lovingly cared for by the other members of the community. May he rest in peace

I print below, with his permission, the Homily delivered at the Requiem Mass by the Reverend Jeremy Ames and also attach the obituary which appeared in the Church Times.

Homily given by Father Jeremy Ames at Dom Kenneth's funeral

Kenneth was born in 1925 in Kent and was a pupil at Dover College. Evacuated to South Wales where he was introduced to a form of Anglican Christianity in which he was strongly drawn. Leaving his evacuation home he joined the Army when World War 2 was still raging. He was not at D Day but was in the next wave of troops to arrive in Normandy. The Battle of Normandy went on for several months and Kenneth was part of it.

At the end of the War Captain Newing was eventually demobilized and he went on to Selwyn College, Cambridge to read Theology. He was not a natural academic, but quietly beavered away there before going to the College of the Resurrection at Mirfield, which was far more Kenneth!

He had a bit of trouble with G.O.E. – the General Ordination Examination – known as God's own exam – but with great foresight Robert Mortimer, the Bishop of Exeter ordained him to the title of Plymstock, just outside Plymouth in 1955. Having served this title he became the parish priest of Plympton St Maurice – just next door! He was their priest for nearly twenty years – keeping in touch with people across the years of his ministry by intercession and prayer and letters. He was the consummate parish priest – but always with something of the monk about him. Compulsively neat and tidy – everything lined up in its proper place!

In spite of the clerical besetting sin of gossip I never heard an ill wind spoken against Fr Kenneth. He was an exemplar of the best of Anglican Catholic priests – he prayed for his people, he loved his people, he visited his people assiduously. And they loved him.

Then he became Archdeacon of Plymouth - I suspect to his great surprise -and then his parish became larger, but his style remained very similar. He visited and cared for the priests in his area as he had his parishioners. Although firmly in the Catholic tradition, he got on well with the more evangelical brethren – largely because he was so faithful in his care for all – and his quiet but very deep spirituality and awareness/sense of God.

In 1982 he became Bishop of Plymouth – or as he put it - “One day I was invited to Westminster Abbey - and came out a Bishop”! I think one can confidently say he never sought to be a prelate, but he was a wonderful Bishop. It was quite a sadness to him to be moved out of the Plymouth area where he had been since his ordination 37 years previously - quite Benedictine really - a real form of stability. He moved to a very neat and tidy house in Dartington with his terrier and his cat, Magnificat. Saddened by their deaths he once sat on the grass with two small children who had lost their cat that day and he happened to call in – a Parish priest doing his rounds and now a Bishop – and sitting by the cat’s grave told the children that “Ajax is being looked after by St Francis”. Very Kenneth, very gentle, very good.

He was also Commissary to the Bishop of Masasi and when visiting there, came back with beautiful Mkonde ebony sculptures, normally crucifixes, which he gave generously to those who might appreciate them. One particularly fine one which he had in his study before he became a monk is now above the altar here at St Nicholas’ Hospital (*an ancient 13th Century almshouse, which is still going strong*).

There was always something of the monk about him. He loved visiting Nashdom, but when he mooted the idea to Abbot Godfrey that he should himself become a monk, the Abbot staved him off – because he was so much the parish priest and a monastic vocation is so different. That was very much in accord with the Rules of St Benedict. Postulants should be turned away and only if they persisted should the door be opened. In 1988 that door was opened and Bishop Kenneth became a novice and eventually Dom Kenneth at Elmore Abbey. His vocation was very real and the natural monk within him came to the fore – but his care for people remained strong.

Throughout his ministry Fr Kenneth, Archdeacon Kenneth, Bishop Kenneth and Dom Kenneth was both a loving pastor and a man of deep spirituality. He worked and he prayed. He loved to say “if you are too busy to pray, you’re too busy.”

Dom Kenneth became a monk as a duck to water – becoming Prior and Oblate Master on the Community’s move to Salisbury – is it ten years now? In those years Kenneth became increasingly frail but was looked after by his brethren, and particularly by Dom Francis. Kenneth would not be content if that was not said. Francis gave hours every day looking after Kenneth’s every need and made it possible for him to stay in the Priory so long.

But today we commend Kenneth with that sure and certain hope which was so real in him – to the hands of Him who made him – to that well deserved holy rest – knowing that Kenneth found peace at the last.

Rest eternal grant unto him, O Lord.