

**FUNERAL MASS OF SISTER ANNE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT  
(MOTHER ANNE)**

**CARMEL MONASTERY, DYSART, FIFE**

**HOMILY PREACHED BY CARDINAL KEITH PATRICK O'BRIEN**

**MONDAY 6 APRIL 2009**

**Introduction:**

On 31 March 2009, just less than a week ago, Mother Anne, as we all know her, received the anointing from the Chaplain, Father Philip Jones, here at Dysart and with the Community praying around her, as they had done so often, she slipped very peacefully away to the Lord. So ended a long life of more than 101 years and almost 70 years of religious profession.

I myself received a faxed letter on 1 April 2009 from Mother Frances, the Prioress, indicating: "We feel bereft, and it seems like the end of an era for Dysart Carmel, but happy also that Mother has at last earned her reward for all she did for our Carmel and, of course, the hidden work of a Carmelite known only to God alone".

If the Sisters here in Carmel feel bereft – so also with the family of Mother Anne and her many many friends. For me it does indeed seem unusual coming to Carmel here in Dysart without the presence of Mother Anne to welcome me and shepherd me along with Mother and her Council to see all of the Sisters in community. In some way our lives here on earth appear to be 'less' because of the death of Mother Anne – however, in the depth of our faith we really believe that they are enhanced because of the presence of Mother Anne before Almighty God.

**Call of Mother Anne to Carmel:**

The call of God to Carmel or indeed to any other vocation, comes to us in different ways.

The first reading of this morning's Mass from the Song of Songs describes in a very beautiful way and in mystical words the call of God to his beloved. The words are indeed so wonderful:

"Come then, my love, my lovely one, come. For see, winter is past, the rains are over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth. The season of glad songs has come, the cooing of the turtle dove is heard in our land. The fig tree is forming its first figs and the blossoming vines give out their fragrance". The lover then issues his cry again to his loved one to come – in the words of the reading: "For your voice is sweet and your face is beautiful". And then the words are added: "My beloved is mine and I am his". How reminiscent these words are of the words in the Gospel according to St John, the beloved disciple: "The most wonderful thing is not that we love God, but that God loves us!".

It was that love that Anne Frances Conroy heard as she was growing up, as she tried to live her life in the world, and then as she received the direction she needed to return home and enter Carmel. Born in Glasgow on 21 August 1907, she was the fourth child in a family of fourteen, who decided to pursue a career in music and set off for New York when she was in her twenties. What a wonderful courageous young woman she must have been to go to New York to pursue her career, rather than in one of the music halls which abounded in Scottish towns and cities at the time of her growing up.

However, Nan was influenced by the preaching of Archbishop Fulton Sheen as she attended daily Mass and also by a priest in the Cathedral who encouraged her in her religious vocation, a Father McIntyre, later to become the Cardinal Archbishop of Los Angeles, who directed her towards Carmel.

Altogether five of her large family of 14 became Carmelite Sisters, four of them ending their days in Dysart Carmel. Her eldest brother became a priest and before his retirement was the Vicar General of the Diocese of Motherwell. The youngest of the girls in the family became a Franciscan Missionary of Mary and served in various missionary countries mainly as superior in difficult circumstances.

Initially entering Carmel in Dumbarton to become Sister Anne of the Holy Spirit, she was asked to come to Dysart in 1941 as the Carmel needed young sisters – and shortly after that she was elected as sub-prioress, then prioress – a position which she held on and off for very many years with her concern for the Sisters never leaving her.

### **Living out her Vocation:**

St Paul in his letter to the Romans in the second reading of today's Mass spells out something of the vocation of a Christian in the world – with words that would apply to the influence of each and every Carmelite Sister.

St Paul writes: “The life and death of each of us has its influence on others: if we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord, so that alive or dead we belong to the Lord”.

It was as if Sister Anne through her life and in her death wanted to influence others – not in any ostentatious way, but rather through her life as a Carmelite Sister, her hidden life of prayer, inspiring her to accomplish great work.

I list as perhaps one of her greatest works being her joining the **Association of British Carmels** in the early 1970's when she was chosen as one of the first Councillors. It was suggested that there be an Infirmary Carmel for the sick and elderly Sisters. Mother Anne seized on this as a wonderful vocation for the Dysart Carmel with its large building and situated on the shores of the River Forth. Where better in loving surroundings, close to the Blessed Sacrament in the chapel, and with outstanding views and in the midst of nature at its best for Carmelite Sisters to lovingly prepare for their final journey towards their loved one in Heaven.

**It was in 1983 that the Infirmary Unit was set up** where the invalid Sisters could be cared for with the aid of outside help. The ladies who have assisted in this way in caring for elderly and sick Carmelite Sisters have indeed become part of the Carmelite family and indeed Carmel here in Dysart could not exist without their kind and loving ministry.

A side effect of the Infirmary Carmel was the fact that the Carmel in Fife itself grew in numbers. One might say that this was an unexpected reward of the generosity of the Sisters in Carmel in Fife, that a number of Sisters came to join the community to assist in the valued apostolate of loving care, while making up membership of the outstandingly happy and prayerful group that exists today.

### **Final Call of the Lord:**

I have quoted from St John's Gospel where we were reminded that the great thing in our lives is not that we love God but rather that God loves us. St John really completes that teaching when he quotes Jesus as raising his eyes to Heaven and saying: "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, so that they may always see the glory you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world". Those beautiful words of Jesus are repeated in today's Gospel.

After her long, dedicated and faithful life on earth, the Lord did indeed want Mother Anne to come to be with him. Thank God, so many of us were able to be here on 21 August 2007 to celebrate Mother Anne's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday and to let her know of something of our love for her in return for all her love and practical help for Carmelite Sisters in Britain and particularly of the sick and the elderly here in Dysart in the midst of her loving community. Then she heard those words which I said on the occasion here of her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday: "The love of any Carmel is not just enclosed within the boundaries of the walls of that Carmel. Rather, there is always an outreach into the local community, into the parish and the diocese, into the country. Many come here seeking spiritual or material help and requests have never been refused". As Mother Anne's age continued to increase, so her mobility was impaired and decreased. Like so many before her, she moved into one of the little rooms in the Infirmary Unit and was cared for there until her death – as she ensured that so many other Sisters were cared for in a similar way. Her 101<sup>st</sup> birthday was celebrated and then, as Mother Frances indicated to me, she seemed to be losing ground. She took various bad turns and the community was prepared for each day being the last day of Mother Anne on earth. However, she continued her life of silent prayer here on earth for another three months until, as indicated, she slipped very peacefully to the Lord on 31 March 2009, surrounded with the love of her Sisters and that intense love of Jesus himself.

### **Conclusion:**

We thank God for her wonderful life; we thank God for the family who inspired in her the thoughts of a vocation; we thank God for all who directed her in that vocation, particularly to join Carmel in Dumbarton and then in Dysart.

And to show our own thanksgiving for Mother Anne herself, we share now in this great sacrament of love, the Sacrifice of the Holy Mass when we prepare to give her mortal remains back to the Lord. No doubt, Mother Anne is looking upon us with love at this present time as she receives so much love from us here on earth.

May God indeed grant her eternal rest and help us to prepare for our own final meeting with the Lord where we too are called to be with our beloved, having influenced others by our lives and our deaths.