

Archdiocese of Southwark



VIGIL MASS FOR ARCHBISHOP MICHAEL BOWEN Sunday 3rd November 2019

Homily given by Archbishop-Emeritus Kevin McDonald

When I was asked to celebrate Mass on the Vigil of the funeral of Archbishop Michael Bowen, I was also asked whether I would like to have the readings of the day or to choose readings from the funeral liturgy. Although I had not then looked at the readings for the day I immediately said that I would like to have them since I always think that's the best and right thing to do. The late Bishop Francis Thomas, who was my predecessor both as Rector of Oscott and Bishop of Northampton, often talked about the importance of the 'discipline of the Lectionary' and what he meant was that whatever the occasion we should always listen to what the Word of God has to say to us on that occasion, rather than trying to put words into God's mouth. And in fact when I did look at our readings for today, one paragraph in the second reading did jump out at me and I said, 'That is Archbishop Michael.'

I'll come to that in a moment, but I would also like this evening to say a personal word about Archbishop Michael. He was, of course, my immediate predecessor as Archbishop of Southwark and someone I liked and admired but who I can't claim to have known very well. But the thing I want to recall and haven't spoken about before is this. As many of you know, after six years as Archbishop of Southwark, I resigned for health reasons, and, of course, I got many letters expressing sympathy and regret, but I particularly appreciated the note I got from Archbishop Michael. He said two things. First of all, he said that he thought that since coming to Southwark I had done everything right. And I appreciated that because I know that I began and initiated things that he would never have dreamed of doing. And secondly, he acknowledged the rightness and integrity of my decision to retire, and coming from him and coming at a very difficult time in my life, that was a source of great strength and reassurance and has remained so.

Archbishop Michael was a good man, a person devoid of any pride or self-importance. But he was a man who did what he was called to do.

The paragraph from the readings that struck me was this:

'We pray continually that God will make you worthy of his call
and by his power fulfil all your desires for goodness
and complete all that you have been doing through faith;
because in this way,
the name of our Lord Jesus Christ will be glorified in you and you in him
by the grace of our God and our Lord Jesus Christ.'

2 Thess 1:11

Saint Paul speaks here about God's call. Archbishop Michael was someone who was called, and who recognised and responded to God's call throughout his life. None of us knows what lies ahead of us. Michael's response to God's call led him to be a student at the English College in Rome, to a parish, to the Beda College as a tutor, and to being Bishop of Arundel and Brighton and Archbishop of Southwark, and Grand Prior of the Knights of the Holy Sepulchre.

In all these assignments, he was and he did what he was called to be and to do. He did the job and in doing that, as he readily said, the name of our Lord Jesus Christ was glorified. His faith and his fidelity ensured that God's work was done in him and in the people he served. He was not a person for great schemes and projects but what he did he did right with kindness, generosity and great hospitality.

Tomorrow he will be remembered with great solemnity but this evening my main emotion is, quite simply, gratitude; gratitude for his life, his witness and his fidelity. I am grateful on my own behalf and on behalf of all the people he served. May he rest in peace.

**Archbishop-Emeritus Kevin McDonald,
Archbishop of Southwark, 2003-2009**