

Fr ANTHONY LOVIS OSB

The task of saying some words in remembrance and appreciation of Fr Anthony has been entrusted to me. I think there are several major groupings of people to keep in mind as I speak and as you listen. You may identify with more than one group, and I hope I can say something to you or on your behalf about Fr Anthony. There is a psalm that we pray at the Office of Vigils early every second Monday morning, which is proposed as a prayer in old age. Verses from it take on special significance as we think of Anthony in his last weeks. For example:

It is you, O Lord, who are my hope, *

my trust, O Lord, since my youth.

On you I have leaned from my birth; †

from my mother's womb you have been my help. *

My hope has always been in you.

There is first of all Anthony's family. Some siblings have predeceased him: a brother Darcy, and three sisters, Veronica, June and Jennifer; present with us today are brothers Neville, Rex and Bob, his two surviving sisters Frances and Vicky and nephews and nieces. Neville was his brother's chief carer in the family home during the time doctors were finalising their diagnosis of Anthony's liver cancer and while he was being fast-tracked for Aged Care Assessment before being admitted to the brand new complex at the Home of the Little Sisters of the Poor at Glendalough, where he spent his last two and a half weeks receiving palliative care and preparing for the end he knew to be not too far off. During that time he had many visits and received much comfort from family, friends and acquaintances, and from parishioners and staff members. How appropriate to Anthony in his situation was a later verse of the psalm: *Do not reject me, now that I am old; when my strength fails do not forsake me.*

Then there is our Benedictine monastic community which he joined in 1976, during Abbot Bernard's time as abbot, doing his novitiate under Fr Anscar and making his first profession in 1977. Some of the following years were spent in Melbourne doing studies for the priesthood; there he lived with the Carmelite Friars at Donvale and attended lectures at the Yarra Theological Union in Box Hill. A couple of years after ordination in December 1982, Fr Anthony spent a year in Sydney following the course at the Centre for Christian Spirituality in Randwick, founded by Fr David Walker, who was later the second Bishop of the Broken Bay diocese in Sydney, since retired. At the time, Fr Walker was the Australian specialist in the writings of the 4th-5th cent monk, John Cassian. Anthony would have come to a richer appreciation of the psalm verse recommended by Abba Isaac to the monks of Cassian's time for constant repetition, helpful in dealing with and overcoming any temptation, a verse St Benedict placed at the beginning of the hours of the Divine Office: *O God, come to my aid; O Lord, make haste to help me.*

Among the variety of works that belong to the NN monastic community, apart from the regular liturgical roles associated with the daily Conventual Mass and the Divine Office, reading and serving in the refectory and domestic duties around the house there is that of offering hospitality to guests and visitors and leading retreats for individuals and groups. One of our priest visitors this morning remembers making his pre-ordination retreat with Fr Anthony in 1984. He gave some retreats in our Guest House to groups of religious sisters and groups of people from various parishes in Perth. Another community work that Fr Anthony was asked to take on and which he did for several years was to be director or chaplain to the lay-people who belong to our group of Benedictine Oblates.

Perhaps Fr Anthony was best known to people outside the monastic community for the two stints, each of several years, which he had as parish priest of New Norcia in the 1980s-90s and again in the early years of the present century. It was in the earlier period that the three state

primary schools on the west side (first Mogumber, then Wannamal and finally Gillingarra) closed down and pupils in those places went by school bus either to Moora or Gingin. The Catholic community in those parts diminished in numbers, as did the monastic community here in New Norcia, to the point that services could no longer be held in the one remaining Mass centre: St Paul's Community Church, Gillingarra. The parish priest at that time, with the agreement of school principals during school hours, or with the support of parents outside school hours, provided basic religious instruction and sacramental preparation to Catholic children on the west side and on the east side in the centres of Calingiri and Yerecoin. I mention all these names because there are those in the congregation who remember well those past decades which saw unprecedented changes in so many areas of faith life and social life. For a few years, Fr Anthony had the NN Parish Pastoral Council's approval for using some of its hard earned funds to offer a stipend to a Perth Sister of Mercy, Sr Margaret Tallon, or one of the Good Samaritan Sisters then living in New Norcia, Sr Teresa Hyland, as a part-time pastoral assistant. Anthony had a very good pastoral touch in dealing with young and old in the parish, readily ministering the sacraments of Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick and the Eucharist and a scriptural word of encouragement to those in difficulty. He baptised a good number of children from within and outside NN parish, officiated at a number of weddings and performed numerous funerals for members of his family and for parishioners. All this was much appreciated. Many messages of condolence confirm this view.

Fr Anthony had a special ability to listen sympathetically and provide encouragement to people who for various reasons were finding the going tough in their lives. Some of those people are most likely here this morning. We know they will miss his cheerful demeanour, his friendship and his compassionate concern for them.

Many of our NN staff over the years came to have a soft spot for Fr A., as he was often called. This may have resulted sometimes in his having too easy access to items of food that were not to be recommended for someone suffering as he did from diabetes.

With regard to sport, as a former player now restricted to the role of spectator, Anthony maintained a keen interest in competitive sport, particularly football and cricket. He wanted his team – his local team in the WAFL, WA against other states, Australia against other countries – to win. He was also something of a film buff, a keen watcher of videos on tape transitioning to DVDs, but from what I can gather, mainly along the lines of Star Wars and X files.

I don't think Fr Anthony's last years were among his happiest. A slow decline in health, energy, and I would say in self-confidence, led to his declining to take up the role of parish priest for the third time when Abbot John asked him to early in his time as abbot. He was able to do some useful work in archives, scanning photographs and later painstakingly transcribing (his typing was slow) some of the monastery chronicles. He was also a keen believer in deterring swallows from nesting under the monastery verandas and leaving their trademarks along the walkways. The 'Showings' of Julian of Norwich was one of his staples for nourishing his faith and hope in God, in Christ our Saviour, and in the Virgin Mary. Our prayer is that he now enjoys what Julian wrote in the final chapter of the long text of her work: "From the time these things were first revealed I had often wanted to know what was our Lord's meaning. It was more than fifteen years after that I was answered in my spirit's understanding. 'You would know our Lord's meaning in this thing? Know it well. Love was his meaning. Who showed it you? Love. What did he show you? Love. Why did he show it? For love. Hold on to this and you will know and understand love more and more. But you will not know or learn anything else – ever!'

So it was that I learned that love was our Lord's meaning. And I saw for certain, both here and elsewhere, that before ever he made us, God loved us; and that his love has never slackened, nor ever shall. In this love all his works have been done, and in this love he has made everything serve us; and in this love our life is everlasting. Our beginning was when we were made, but the love in which he made us never had beginning. In it we have our beginning. / All this we shall see in God for ever. May Jesus grant this. Amen."