

**Memorial Mass
for
Rt Rev Mgr Graham Leonard**

The life of Graham Leonard has been a rich tapestry of praise to God and of enduring trust in the gift of God's Eternal Word made flesh, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Master.

There can be no other starting point for our prayerful reflection this afternoon, as we gather to thank God for the richness of his blessing in the life of Graham Leonard and to pray for the repose of his soul.

As we do so I extend our warmest condolences to Priscilla and to her sons James and Mark and, of course, to all who miss Graham Leonard. Some miss him as a beloved bishop, in North London, in Cornwall and of course, here in the Diocese of London. They mourn him as a loving pastor and a courageous leader. Some miss him as a kind and devoted priest, qualities that always shone through all the high responsibilities that came his way and which emerged again in the great spiritual and priestly contribution he made among us in the

Catholic Church. Some will miss him as a faithful friend, as a grandfather, and, of course, as a father and, you Priscilla, as a devoted husband and companion of over almost seventy years. I am so glad that we can come together today to be united in prayer as well as in mourning.

For my part, which is comparatively small, I remember him first of all and most clearly as a great protagonist for education and for education in schools of a religious character. I was privileged to witness the growing trust and partnership between Cardinal Hume and Bishop Leonard particularly at the time of the 1988 Education Reform Bill. Together, but with Graham using his position in the House of Lords to great effect, they secured a strong position for religious education in all schools, a position which has been defended ever since.

This commitment to education was deeply rooted in his life and ministry, ever since his appointment, in 1955, as Director of Education for the Diocese of St Alban's. From there he served the cause of education both locally and

nationally and gained all the experience which he brought to those critical debates of 1988.

The First Reading we have just heard, from St Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, rings with the kind of courage and confidence which marked the life and ministry of Graham Leonard.

'With God on our side who can be against us?'

'We may be certain that after such a gift he will not refuse anything he can give.' This depth of confident faith was surely a hall-mark of this intelligent, studious and considerate disciple. From an evangelical background, through a resolute and methodical study of theology, along with an intellectual integrity which permitted no resolvable ambiguity, he made a journey of faith which has such close resonances with that of John Henry Newman. He knew some of the same struggles, the same pain of loss, the same peace of resolution.

As we look back, briefly, over his long life, so many things come to mind, many of them well recorded in the full obituaries which have been published and which, therefore, do not need to be recalled here this afternoon.

But one does: his determination that, in his service of the Church, he would struggle for the integrity of faith which he saw as best expressed in the wide Catholic communion. Within that scope, the question of the status of the ordained ministry was crucial, for it pointed to wider issues of sacramental life and authority. His love for the Eucharist was deep and enduring and, therefore, so was his love for the priesthood.

These questions, of course, are still unresolved between the Churches and today we pray for the steady and continuing process of dialogue and growing unity between the See of Rome and the Anglican Communion. Indeed the announcement of a third round of ARCIC dialogues is a cause of hope for us all.

But it was these issues that saw Graham Leonard lead the serious questioning of the Anglican-Methodist process in the late 1960's and see its collapse in May 1972. Despite this opposition, he was dedicated to close cooperation with the Methodist Church throughout Cornwall after his appointment to the Diocese of Truro in 1973. Cornish

Methodists had their own reasons for opposing the unity proposals.

That unity between the Church of England and the Methodist Church is again in the spotlight, such are the ways of Providence. Perhaps the debate is framed somewhat differently today, with all the events of the last thirty-five years. But I suspect Graham will watch this process unfold with great interest from the much higher viewing position which we trust he now enjoys.

We were glad to welcome him into the full communion of the Catholic Church and I personally was glad to play a small part in all the discussions which took place at that time. Here, too, I learned about his attentiveness to detail and to matters which he held to be of great importance. Thus the meticulous way in which he gathered and kept documentation of the circumstances of his ordinations not only signalled the importance he attached to the matter but also laid the ground for the gracious response he received from Pope John Paul II. His 'conditional ordination' here in the chapel in Archbishop's House was significant not

only for him but also for clarifying the way in which we approached the reception of many of his friends and colleagues in Anglican orders. That influence, that profound respect and acknowledgement of the grace-filled character of that ministry, continues to this day and into our present discussions of the implications of Pope Benedict's own recent decisions to which we, in this country, will respond with open hearts.

But back to St Paul. Once again, Paul is certain: 'For I am certain of this: neither death nor life, no angel, no prince, nothing that exists, nothing still to come, not any power, or height or depth, nor any created thing can ever come between us and the love of God made visible in Christ Jesus our Lord.' This assurance of faith is so important for us, whenever we accompany a loved one to the threshold of death. And this is particularly true for all who were close to Graham in these last long months. There is no twilight zone of semi-consciousness, when a person is in some other inner space, which can separate them from Christ. Those of us on the outside of such experience may watch with anxiety and heart-

ache. But the Lord is most certainly there, gathering to himself all who open their hearts to him. This is a truth which brings us such great comfort.

The words of the Gospel fill out that comfort. There is a place being prepared for us. He shall return to take us with him. These words remind us afresh of the promise not simply of life after death but of the fullness of life, in union with Christ, in the Resurrection of the dead. That is the Life of which the Gospel speaks and which Christ embodies and promises to us. That is the place to which he is going. It is the Truth which he is preparing for us because it is the Truth of our nature, the purpose for which we have all been created. Indeed this is the Way, the journey, on which we are cast from the moment of our conception. And Jesus is its Master, but only in his loving union with the Father and only through the great gateway of death. So now we pray for Graham that, as a loving and faithful disciple of this one Master, he too will enjoy that fullness of the resurrection, in expectation of which may he now rest in peace.

Eternal rest give unto him O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon him. May he rest in peace. Amen

+ Vincent Nichols