

Archbishop Fred J Hiltz
Memorial Service for Canon Robert L. Falby
St. James Cathedral, Toronto
Wednesday, July 8, 2015

Sermon

“In thy word, Lord, is my trust, to thy mercies fast I fly;
Though I am but clay and dust, yet thy grace can life me high.”

Richard Lloyd

Let me begin by saying thank you to Barbara, Patrick, Caroline and Alison for the opportunity you have given all of us to gather here this morning to pay our respects to Robert, to give thanks for his life and the many ways in which it touched ours and to pray that by God’s grace we may follow his good example and with him be a partaker of the promises of Christ in life and in death.

As I remember Robert, this prayer written by the 17th century bishop and theologian Jeremy Taylor comes to mind.

“O God, whose days are without end and whose mercies cannot be numbered: make us, we pray, deeply aware of the shortness and uncertainty of human life, and let your Holy Spirit lead us in holiness and righteousness all our days; that when we shall have served you in our generation, we may be gathered to our ancestors, having the testimony of a good conscience, in the communion of the catholic Church, in the confidence of a certain faith, in the comfort of a reasonable religious and holy hope, in favour with you, our God, and in perfect charity with all. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

This prayer holds for me so much of what I know and respect about Robert. It speaks to life and how we’re called to live it. It speaks to death and how we face it. It speaks to our faith and hope in Christ Jesus.

It opens with a lovely reference to the glory and generosity of God “whose days are without end and whose mercies cannot be numbered.” This is the God of all creation, “In whose hands are the caverns of the earth and the heights of the hills. The sea is his for he made it and his hands have moulded the dry land.” (Psalm 95:4-5) This God makes the sun rise by day and stretches out the star lit heaven by night. In the midst of such great acts as these the psalmist reminds us of the intimate work of God in our own creation. “You knit me together in my mother’s womb. Your eyes beheld my limbs, yet unfinished in the womb... they were fashioned day by day, when as yet there were none of them...I will thank you because I am marvellously made.” (Psalm 139)

In our making God has blessed us with memory, reason, and skill, heart, with mind and heart and hand to live full, happy and productive lives.

In that knowledge Robert embraced life and lived it well and fully to the end. He is remembered for his great devotion to his family – to his wife Barbara and to Alison and Patrick and Caroline and their spouses and their children. He loved much and he was much loved. He delighted in family gatherings at home and at the cottage. He was a great host and he could engage everyone in conversation of one kind or another.

Of his fun loving ways with the grandchildren Alison shared with me that when he met small children he would make their eyes sparkle. He might pretend to mix-up their names or be scared of an imaginary bear. “He once let me in on his technique” she said, “You have to let kids think they’re smarter than you are – to empower them. At the same time, they have to wonder whether you might be smarter than you are letting on. Like ‘Does he really believe that?’”

In his profession as a lawyer life Robert was diligent in every way. He was a man of integrity who did his absolute utmost to represent his clients well. A highly respected partner with Miller Thompson LLP he is recognized for his many years of distinguished service, working right up until the end of 2014.

In these last seven months Robert has known as our prayer for this day remind us, that as precious as life is it can be precarious. As full and fascinating as it is, it can also be fragile. How quickly it can change. How suddenly our health can decline. How uncertain our future can be. How quickly our days are numbered. How unexpectedly we find ourselves preparing for death.

Throughout his illness Robert continued to live his life as fully as he could. With courage and patience, indeed as Barbara has said, with an irrepressible optimism and humour, he embraced a growing number of limitations on what he could do. Through it all he was upheld by the love of his family, the care of an incredible medical team, and the prayers of the Church! He so appreciated those prayers that on June 5th just three days before he died he dictated this message for Archbishop Colin Johnson and a host of others.

“As I woke up this morning, it occurred to me that I am the subject of a wide circle of prayer within the communion, which came on spontaneously for me as assistance in bearing all this. The church universal – one body, one mind – is close to my heart. Where I previously understood this intellectually, I now know it fully. I’m not only grateful for your prayers. I want to acknowledge how supportive it is for me personally in bearing up to the challenge on a day-to-day basis. Such an outpouring of prayer is enormously supportive and an illustration of the phrase ‘we are one body.’ Please know that your prayers are reciprocated.”

After Robert’s good example we pray today that the Holy Spirit may lead us in holiness and righteousness all our days: that our hearts be inclined to the will and word and ways of God in this world.

With respect to holiness of life Robert seems to have been guided by the counsel of St. Paul.

“What ever is true whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and anything worthy of praise, think about these things...and the God of peace will be with you”. (Philippians 4: 8-9)

With respect to righteousness that is right relations under God and in Christ, Robert will be forever remembered for a brief but powerful statement he made at General Synod in 1995. Our Primate, Archbishop Michael Peers had delivered The Apology for the wrongs committed in the Indian Residential Schools. On behalf of the whole Church he said he was sorry, he assured survivors that his words would be accompanied by actions and called the Church to paths of healing and reconciliation however long they may be. Many were glad of The Apology and appreciated it. Some raised concerns about admissions of guilt on the part of the Church and ensuing litigation. In the midst of such a rhetoric of fear Robert Falby stood up, looked around, and emphatically said of the apology, “It was the right thing to do.” The Synod sat in silence for a moment and then rose as one in sustained applause. As Stuart Mann put it, Robert’s comment has proven to be a defining message of the church as it continues to address the legacy of the Residential Schools.

Robert always stood by The Apology and every effort on the part of the Church to live out its commitments to healing and reconciliation and new life. He honoured the work of Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission and our Church’s support of its mandate. And were he to speak to us today, he would challenge us to make the Commissioners’ Calls to Action in advancing reconciliation in this country, priorities in our work going forward.

Robert took great interest in the ever widening circles of the Church – local, national, and global.

He was a faithful member of this Cathedral Church, the long time Chancellor of this Diocese of Toronto and Advisor to its bishops and Executive Council and Synod. He was a member of The General Synod and served as Prolocutor from 2008-2013. I was always personally grateful for the manner in which he carried out his duties as Prolocutor, - quietly, diligently, efficiently, always in consultation with the other Officers of the General Synod. He had an eye for detail, an ear for nuance. Clarity, and charity were the hallmarks of his counsel and advice which always moved us forward in good ways. In matters of governance he was convinced that structures have value in so far as they serve the Church’s commitment to God’s mission in the world.

- proclaiming the Good News of the Reign of God
- teaching and nurturing men and women for life long discipleship
- helping those in need
- building a more just healthy and peaceful world, and
- caring for the earth.

At the time of his illness and death Robert was a member of the Council of General Synod and chair of the Commission on the Marriage Canon, a task he took on with great care and concern for the depth and breadth of conversation required in the Church. In guiding the Church Robert gave very generously of his talent and his time. He also gave very generously of his treasure in supporting the good work of this Cathedral and the diocesan initiative called Faith

Works, the Anglican Appeal for work in The North and overseas, the Anglican Foundation of Canada and the Primate's World Relief and Development Fund. His generosity will long be remembered and appreciated. Indeed all the respect and gratitude with which he was presented the Anglican Award of Merit in 2004 lives on in the heart of our beloved Church.

Fascinated with all things Anglican, Robert readily embraced the truth that worldwide our Churches strive to be

Formed by Scripture

Shaped by Worship

Ordered for Communion, and

Directed by God's Mission.

He followed with great interest the work of the Anglican Communion and in particular the work of the Anglican Consultative Council, and the Anglican Communion Legal Advisors Network, making enormous contribution to its work..

Truly dear friends, Robert lived and died as the prayer for this day reads, "in the Communion of the catholic church". If we are to honour the memory of his many labours, we will apply ourselves to the work of the Church with a similar zeal and steadfastness.

Our prayer concludes with the petition that "when we shall have served God all our days we with Robert will be gathered to our parents and all our ancestors in the faith having the testimony of a good conscience, in the confidence of a certain faith, in the comfort of a reasonable religious and holy hope in favour with God and in charity with all people."

In that annual journey we make through the liturgical year - from the cry of the prophet, Comfort ye Comfort ye my people to his call to prepare The Way of the Lord, from the Advent of the Messiah to his life and ministry of proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom of God coming on earth as in heaven. From his Precious Death to his mighty Resurrection and Glorious Ascension, Robert took great delight. He enjoyed the songs of all the seasons of our life in Christ and at the end of his days these were a great comfort to him.

He trusted in the word of the Good Shepherd "I know my own and my own know me. My sheep hear my voice and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they will never perish. No one will snatch them from my love and care."

Even in the shadow of death Robert knew the Good Shepherd was there to comfort and guide. to spread a table before him,
to anoint his head with oil,
to make his cup to run over. (Psalm 23)

From deep within he lived by these words.

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." (Psalm 23)

As we come to this house of prayer today and gather at this table in Eucharistic feast, in this requiem for Robert, we pray saying,

"May the angels of God surround him;

May the saints of God welcome him in peace; and
May he gaze upon you Lord face to face and taste the blessedness of perfect rest.”

Having thus prayed for him, we then pray for ourselves that following Robert’s good example, honouring and tending and labouring for those same things that were important to him, we too, at the end of our days, may know the voice of The Good Shepherd saying “Come, come and inhabit the place I have prepared for you”. “Come and know that peace I give. Come and know the joy of eternal life in my abiding love.”

Let us then with Robert embrace life in all its fullness. Let us cherish it and enjoy it as long as we have it. And when the time comes, let us like him, let it go gracefully and thankfully, knowing that the Lord is the giver and in him is a life that never dies.” (Theodore Parker Ferris) Amen.