

**Homily for the Funeral of Fr Jeremiah Dwyer SMA - 7<sup>th</sup> August 2008**  
**At St Joseph's SMA Parish Church, Blackrock Road, Cork**  
**Preached by Fr Damian Bresnahan SMA, Provincial Councillor**

Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> August was a difficult day for Fr Jerry Dwyer's family. It was a difficult day but also a very special day because Fr Jerry's sister Ann and her son Denis and brother Dan and his wife Brenda knew that when they were called by Fr O'Shea before breakfast that it was to come and say goodbye to their older brother who was such a part of their life. The family sat with Jerry from breakfast until supper when he took his last breath just before 6.00pm.

The first reading of scripture for today's celebration is the Call of Jeremiah – a reading which can speak to all of us about our calling in life – today however we acknowledge the Lord putting out his hand to Jeremiah Dwyer and touching his breath for the last time as he called him home to Himself.

Our gathering in prayer today of the Dwyer family, the Society of African Missions and the friends and associates of Fr Jeremiah Dwyer is not just to acknowledge the Lord calling him home to Himself but today's gathering of family and missionary society and friends is for a celebration of the life of Jerry Dwyer from 1924 to 2008 and a celebration of Jerry's entry into a new life with God. We pray that Fr Jerry will meet God face to face and that he will be reunited with his parents and his sister Maud, who he was very close to, and to Michael and Maureen and to Pat – his family who have gone before him. I'm conscious that tomorrow is Pat's anniversary of three years so this is a very special week for Kathleen his wife and their children.

The life of Jeremiah Dwyer started on the College Road and the South Terrace in 1924 and you could say that it ended at Somerton Park, Ballinlough and Blackrock Road 84 years later. For Fr Jerry, Cork was always very important to him. He didn't have too far to walk over to school on Sullivan's Quay and later to the School of Commerce where he studied advanced book keeping. During the following years when Jerry worked as an accountant he was very involved in the life of Cork in commercial and sporting circles. He was known as a nifty footballer and just the other day I was looking at a silver trophy on his window sill which he won with commercials for basketball in 1949. At the age of 26 years Jerry heard the Lord calling him in a different direction which started at our house of studies at Dromantine, Newry to prepare for the Missionary Priesthood.

I wish to acknowledge and welcome here today Fr Kieran O' Reilly, the Superior General of the Society of African Missions. Fr Kieran works from our Generalate in Rome and is at home on holidays with his father and mother. It's great to have you here today.

After ordination in 1956, which was the Centenary of the founding of the SMA, Fr Jerry was appointed to Kaduna in the North of Nigeria and it was on this mission in West Africa that Jerry was to spend the next twelve years of his life – a time which he found very fulfilling and where he gave of his best. It was an exciting time for mission with the beginning of schools and hospitals and a lot of expansion in the church.

Unfortunately Jerry's health ran into difficulty and it was directed medically that he should no longer work in the tropics – so started a new direction where Jerry was to work in pastoral ministry outside of Africa. This journey took him to parishes in Westminster, England, to parishes in Cork, Waterford and Lismore, Kerry and finally his last 15 years of contented pastoral ministry were lived out in the diocese of Killaloe.

Last night Bishop Buckley came to pay his respects and today I acknowledge the Vicar General of Cork, Msgr. Leonard O' Brien. Bishop Walsh of Killaloe is unable to attend but is represented today by Fr Pat Creed and parishioners from his last parish.

St Paul in the letter to the Romans which we have just listened to in our second reading speaks to us of our influence on others. Jerry Dwyer was known as a dedicated and hardworking priest who carried out his ministry in a generous and effective manner. Each of us here today and the peoples of Kaduna and Ireland where Jerry worked know how he influenced life in one way or another.

Some would describe Fr Jerry Dwyer as one of the old fashioned clerics – maybe the black hat that he always wore symbolized some of his character. Jerry was always meticulously dressed – so neat and tidy and well presented – maybe not something characteristic of most SMAs.

Jerry was very precise and time and order were very important for him. I remember two funny stories: Some time ago on a lovely summer's day we decided in the community to have a barbeque and so I announced that we would meet for lunch in the garden at 12.30pm. The idea of course was to sit around and chat over a drink and that we would eat whenever the food was ready on the barbeque... but not for Jerry Dwyer. He was standing holding his plate expecting the food exactly at 12.30pm as announced. As family you will appreciate this from his visits to your homes. Time for Fr Jerry was not something to play with!

Another funny incident was on Tuesday. Jerry was clearly dying but when his brother Dan arrived from Waterford Jerry opened his eyes and said 'would you go and comb your hair'. Even on his death-bed he was expecting order and expected his younger brother to be well presented.

However alongside all the formal exterior Jerry was a gentle and caring person. He had a smile which used to speak volumes and brought out his charm and warmth. When Jerry smiled you felt it was especially for you.

As a *boy* who loved the rebel county of Cork – both city and beloved Skibbereen where his parents hailed from, maybe Jerry was a wee bit of a rebel in his own gentle way. He liked his independence which perhaps his car symbolized – his car was always special for him and you can imagine how he was when it was suggested to him a few years ago that maybe his driving days were over.

Using the words of St. Luke in today's gospel – Fr, Jerry Dwyer was always dressed for action – you could say dressed to kill. As a good organizer with a precision for duty I'd say that Jerry was ready to open the door when the Master came and knocked. We give thanks to God for the good and long life of Jerry Dwyer – brother, uncle, friend, neighbour, SMA Missionary Priest.

May he rest in peace with the God whom he served for so long. Two years ago when some of us doubted, because of sickness, whether Jerry would be around he celebrated the Golden Jubilee of his Ordination with his classmates... two of whom are here today: Fr Dan Murphy and Fr Con O' Leary. Now we pray that he will celebrate with something richer than gold – the fullness of God's presence in heaven. May he rest in peace.