

Funeral Mass for Michael Hodgetts KSG
St Chad's Cathedral – Thursday 12th January 2023
Homily Preached by Bishops David McGough

“Come to me all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest. Shoulder my yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart and you will find rest for yourself.”

Such was the invitation of Jesus as he invited his disciples to follow in his footsteps. It is a reassuring invitation, because it is rooted not so much in the overwhelming majesty and transcendence of God, but in his gentleness and humility.

It is to this God of humility and gentleness, and to his rest, that we commend Michael today.

I first met Michael as a sixth former in the early 1960s, when Michael came to Cotton College. He taught me Latin Set Books at A level, and so I can count myself, along with thousands of others over the years, who will remember Michael not only for his learning, but also for his characteristic gentleness and understated good humour.

Since then he has been a constant present in the archdiocese, as a musician and choir leader, as an RE teacher in our secondary schools and at Maryvale, but more especially as an historian who has enriched us with a deeper insight into the history of our faith in penal times, and especially at Harvington Hall.

We thank God for these many blessings, but especially we thank God for the blessing of his marriage to Barbara, and the life that he has shared with both his children and grandchildren.

It is in the readings, chosen by Michael, that we find the faith that sustained him throughout his life, and the faith that sustains us as we commend him to his Lord.

The first reading, from the Book of Wisdom, is a message of encouragement in difficult times.

“The souls of the virtuous are in the hands of God, no torment shall ever touch them.”

These words were spoken originally to a persecuted and scattered Jewish people who suffered at the hands of the Greek and Roman empires during the occupation of their land.

Michael, and indeed everyone of us, will have known those times when life is difficult. Those times conniver overwhelm us, or, with the grace of God, they can become the moments in which we are refined, as gold is refined in the furnace, and begin to grow into the likeness of God himself.

“God has put them to the test, and proved them worthy to be with him....those who are faithful will live with him in love, for grace and mercy await those he has chosen.”

Michael believed these words, and it is to this grace and mercy of God that we commend Michael today.

There is surely some sense in which we all fear death, and the darkness that it seems to threaten. In the Gospel that Michael chose for today, that darkness was very real and touched Jesus himself.

“There was darkness over the whole land, and Jesus cried out with a loud voice: My God, my God why have you forsaken me.”

The Lord who calls us to himself, emptied himself and became as we are. He shared not only our joy, but also our darkness and our sorrow. But in Jesus, death was not an ending, but a revelation that tore down everything that stands between us and God himself.

“The veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.”

Today we pray that in the death and resurrection of his son Jesus, the father will have torn everything that stood between Michael and the God in whose likeness he was created.

Make him live forever in the grace, the lights and the love of his God.