

8th February 2023

Pattern

“Be a pattern to others, then all will go well.”

Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De Legibus*

Today I'm seeking to do justice to the death of a friend and colleague, and pay a proper tribute to the lasting influence he has had on me.

In the first week of January, I attended the funeral Canon John McAllister, who died at the age of ninety. John – Father Mac, as he was affectionately known – was the priest in my first parish in the 1970s. He was an experienced clergyman when I was in the infancy of my ministry; a man full of wisdom against my lack of knowledge; a priest whose ministry transcended denominational boundaries while I was a greenhorn in ecumenical matters. And he was a wise colleague to me and many others.

A “Leither” by birth, John’s ministry took him from Falkirk to Nigeria, from the Central Belt to the Kingdom of Fife, from the Holy Land to the Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes, always and everywhere as a Father to the whole people of God. He was ahead of his time in the use of contemporary music in Catholic liturgies. His openness led him to abandoning the closed confessional and the imposing altar rail. His commitment to the welfare of the people of his parish saw him at community meetings and on prison visits, drawing out the latent gifts of his flock, visiting the pubs on Christian Aid collections, and, quite simply, being Father Mac to everyone.

He’d been the founding priest in a tough Edinburgh housing scheme six years before I arrived. Shortly after my Induction, he invited my wife and me to his home for “a wee welcome”. There was drink on the study table. “The beer’s on the parish,” John said with a smile, “and the whisky’s on me. And in any event,” he continued, “it’s a long-standing tradition that when a new minister or priest arrives in the area, the established colleague invites them for a drink.” “Great!” I said. “And how long has this tradition been going on?” “Oh, just for a week,” was Father Mac’s reply.

John McAllister was a man whose presence changed the character of a room when he walked in, a priest who was a model and mentor for a young minister, and whose influence I’ll never forget. Father Mac, I thank God that you were a pattern to me as well as to others. May all continue to go well for us both, my friend. *Requiem in Pacem.*

A prayer for today

May our loved ones rest in peace, as they rest always in our special memories. Amen

An original reflection by @ Tom Gordon

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