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Sydney Cathedral full at Requiem Mass for Fr Amin Abboud

The Apostolic Nuncio in Australia was the principal celebrant of the Requiem Mass offered for Fr Amin Abboud on Friday July 26.

29/07/2013

Family, friends, students and priests were among thousands who attended a Requiem Mass offered in St Mary's Cathedral, Sydney, for the

repose of the soul of Fr Amin Abboud.

Archbishop Paul Gallagher, Apostolic Nuncio in Australia, told the congregation that the Holy Father sent his thoughts and prayers.

The Maronite Bishop of Australia, Bishop Antoine Tarabay, joined several other concelebrants of the Requiem Mass, including Monsignor Peter Williams, representing Bishop Anthony Fisher OP, Bishop of Parramatta, and Monsignor Victor Martinez, Regional Vicar of Opus Dei for Australia and New Zealand.

Here is the homily given by Monsignor Martinez:

Dear brothers and sisters,

We have gathered to pray for the eternal rest of Fr Amin Abboud. I would like to start by thanking his Excellency Archbishop Paul

Gallagher, Apostolic Nuncio in Australia, His Excellency Bishop Antoine Tarabay of the Maronite diocese of St Maroun, and Monsignor Peter Williams representing Bishop Anthony Fisher OP of the Parramatta diocese for their fraternal support and company in this Mass. I also thank all my brother priests concelebrating with us. Thanks to all of you who join us in praying for our beloved Fr Amin.

This is without doubt the most difficult homily I have had to prepare in my nearly 40 years as a priest. Having been with Fr Amin for a long time, I know that, on this occasion, he would prefer that I be very brief. Just to simply say: "Let us pray for the eternal rest of this poor servant of God, Fr Amin Abboud". If my own personal inclination were to be guided only by his preferences I would have to leave it at that but, of course, I will tell you more than that.

Since his passing away, many people have commented about his great intellectual capacity and they are right. He was a highly intelligent man, very well qualified for his medical profession which he loved very much. He practised it for some years until he decided to give it up to be fully and cheerfully available for the apostolates of Opus Dei first as a layman and, in the last seven years, as a priest. Although he could not devote to it a great deal of time, he brilliantly obtained his Doctorate in Philosophy and developed a very good knowledge of Bioethics and Moral Philosophy.

Although this aspect of his personality was remarkable, in my opinion, it pales in insignificance compared with another which I think was his greatest asset: his enormous and very balanced heart. I know that many of the congregation gathered here today have been

touched by his great affection in one way or another and in a very personal manner. Therefore it would perhaps be better to hear your stories and savour the sweet memories of your personal friendship with Fr Amin and that would do so much good for our souls. But, alas! It is not possible. So as you cannot tell me your story I would like to tell you mine. What I know about the loves he carried in his heart.

I met Fr Amin some 25 odd years ago. One of my early recollections of him is a conversation we had in our little Bargo Conference Centre when he was a young medical graduate. We were walking up and down in the garden talking about spiritual matters. I do not remember exactly what we said to each other only the impression that his words left on me. It was clear that that young doctor loved God very much and had a very refined soul that would continue

growing more and more in that love. This impression has never faded; on the contrary it has been confirmed with the passage of the years. I have seen that love for God grow in him in an unassuming and natural way. A more recent impression is seeing him many days going to pray in our very small chapel. As small as it is, he would always sit in the first pew, as close as possible to the Tabernacle carrying no book to read or to help him to pray. He would spend his time looking intently at the Tabernacle clearly in communion with our Lord and enjoying his Presence in the Eucharist. So his first love was for our Lord. And as Fr Amin loved him very much, God has also shown his love for him.

God loves every one of us with an infinite love. We need to be convinced that he is our Father and loves you and me with his whole being which is pure Love. Most of the

time He is very subtle expressing His love for us. He does it only in the intimacy of our heart, if we know how to listen to him. But from time to time, with some people who love Him passionately, he shows more externally his love for them. I think that this was the case with Fr Amin.

As you know he was doing his retreat when he passed away. One of his many tasks was precisely to organize that retreat and he did it to the last detail which was to allocate the rooms for each of the attendants. He chose for himself the last room of an isolated corridor and for some strange reason the room next to his remained vacant. It was the second day of the retreat and the last meditation of that day was about the hope we should foster of Heaven. He finished the day with everybody else doing the examination of conscience in the Chapel and retired to his room. As he was getting ready for bed he

suffered a massive heart attack and fell to the floor. Of course nobody could hear his fall and help him because nobody was nearby.

I think that we will understand the meaning of these circumstances better if I quote some words of St Josemaría which Fr Amin loved very much: *God does not act like a hunter, who waits for the smallest slip on the part of his prey to shoot it down. God is like a gardener who cares for the flowers: he waters them, he protects them, and he only cuts them when they are at their best and in full bloom. God takes souls to himself when they are ripe.*

God decided that he was ripe and he said loud and clear: “Fr Amin is off limits, you cannot interfere, he is now mine”. He wanted to take him to Himself and the setting was prepared in the most refined way: the retreat, the meditation on Heaven, his last

examination of conscience, the location of his room...Perhaps I read too much into all this but I leave to you to consider if I may be right.

I said that Fr Amin liked very much the words of St Josemaría that I have just read. But to tell you the truth he liked everything about St Josemaría. I was edified when he frequently commented to me about the wisdom and beauty of some aspect of the spirit of Opus Dei that at that moment he had been meditating on from the writings and pastoral experiences of St Josemaría. He loved also his successor Bishop Alvaro del Portillo and was looking forward to his impending Beatification. His vocation to Opus Dei was linked with Bishop del Portillo. Fr Amin decided to join Opus Dei in the last day of Don Alvaro's visit to Sydney in 1987. He was very grateful to him because he knew that he had prayed for him in order that he might make the right

decision. His union with the present Prelate, Bishop Javier Echevarría was very strong. I remember him telling me coming from Rome after his ordination as a priest: “I caught his infection (of Bishop Echevarría) of souls and apostolate”.

The love for Opus Dei was also very much in his heart. He has dedicated his best energies during these last 25 years to that love. Love for his brothers and sisters in Opus Dei has been an integral part of it and we have all been very blessed by it. Twenty of those years were occupied with tasks of government and responsibility. First working very closely with Monsignor John Masso, also a holy priest, very dear to many here present. Fr Amin, no doubt, would like that we remember him at this moment because he learned a lot from him. Then with Monsignor George Rossman and the last five years with me.

Having been in contact with him virtually every day during the last five years we have shared many things. Not only matters to do with Opus Dei but also of his love for the Church. Obviously he loved Opus Dei because he understood that our Lord had chosen this path for him to love him and to serve the Church. The love for Opus Dei did not restrict him but made him more sensitive to the needs of the Church. I have received many condolences from Australian Bishops. Some from far, from Brazil where they are for World Youth Day: Cardinal Pell, Bishop Fisher, Bishop Kennedy. Others closer: Wagga Wagga, Toowoomba, Adelaide, Ballarat...They all say the same, all feel sadness because of the loss and because they have been inspired by his good spirit.

He confided to me things about his family. I know that he would like that I keep to myself what was said in

confidence but I could not fail to mention my deep admiration for the veneration he had for his parents, the affection for his siblings, Janet his sister in law, and how proud he was of his five nephews. This was another enormous love of his life.

Sometimes, with his self-deprecating good humour, he joked about his Lebanese nose and sense for the value of money but he was very proud of his Lebanese heritage. He was ordained a priest for the Prelature of Opus Dei and his bishop is the Prelate of Opus Dei, but he is a bi-ritual priest; that is a priest who can exercise his ministry both in the Latin rite and in the Maronite rite. That is why it is so fitting, and I very grateful for the presence of his Excellency Bishop Tarabay and some of the priests of his diocese.

In our work together I always found his judgement very sharp and wise.

Facing difficult situations his fortitude was remarkable. In Opus Dei we practice the recommendation of our Lord about fraternal correction. He corrected me fraternally when correction was needed, for this I am very grateful; but all the same he was very deferential and obliging to me. I see this as an act of deep humility. His work was thorough but always quick. I did not manage to keep him at the desk one minute longer than it was needed. He would tell me: "What I like are people". He had always a plan to see somebody here or there. In this way he met many of you, squeezing his time to the limit. This was not activism. Many times returning home he would say: "I met this new person or family and they are so good". What he was looking for were souls to bring closer to God and he could only see good things in them. This was another great love of his: souls for the love of God. As I

said at the beginning many here present will be able to share with us wonderful stories of his selfless dedication and genuine friendship which have helped them to get closer to God.

At this point in time I would like to quote St Josemaría again from his homily on **The Heart of Christ**. He says, *Scripture uses the expression “heart” in its full human meaning, as the summary and source, expression and ultimate basis, of one’s thoughts, words and actions. A man is worth what his heart is worth.* Fr Amin’s heart was bursting with all these loves I have mentioned. His worth and greatest has not come from his mind but from his big heart.

So where does all this leads us? I cannot think of a better answer than what our Prelate wrote to us after learning of the passing away of Fr Amin: *Let us ask Amin to help us from*

Heaven to be, like him, faithful until the end, and that he gets from the goodness of God Our Lord many vocations in these dearly beloved countries. The example of Fr Amin is an encouragement to be faithful to the end. But to be faithful to the end we need to be faithful every day in the ordinary circumstances of our life. Faithful to our Christian vocation in every moment: this is the resolution I think he will invite us to make.

A Christian vocation lived in full and to the end will never fail to promote many other Christian vocations around it, faithful to the end. This was a burning passion of Fr Amin; a gift of God to him. He also had good teachers of this passion: as I said our present Prelate is one but also Monsignor John Masso and ultimately St Josemaría. They all are good teachers of this, now I think we could also add Fr Amin to this list.

Let us ask him that we also acquire that burning passion for souls.

Fr Amin, like all of you, and all the members of Opus Dei had a tender love for Mary. We entrust to her maternal care the eternal rest of our beloved brother Amin and the desires for holiness that his life has fostered in our lives.

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