

## THE HARBOUR PARISHES

*Monkstown – Passage West – Ringaskiddy – Shanbally*



# Fr Con Cronin SPS

St Patrick's Missionary Society

The Harbour Parishes 2012-2021

*Gratitude is the memory of the heart.*

IN LASTING GRATITUDE



## *St Patrick's Missionary Society remembers:*

Cornelius Finbarr (Con) Cronin was born on the 17<sup>th</sup> of September 1948 to Con Cronin and his wife Mary (née Murphy) of "Mine View House", Borlin, Bantry, Co Cork. Con was the youngest of a family of one girl and three boys. He received his primary education at Borlin National School from 1953 to 1962. As he was about to enter secondary school his mother became seriously ill and Con was the only member of the family available to look after her. He spent three years as her full-time carer.

After his mother's death he went to work in Reendesert Hotel, Ballylickey, Bantry, and later found employment in St Lawrence's Hotel, Howth, Co Dublin. A career in the hospitality sector beckoned. But since his earliest years he thought about being a priest. While in Dublin he made contact with St Patrick's Missionary Society with the intention of becoming a missionary priest. There was one big obstacle: he had no secondary education. At that time St Patrick's Missionary Society had a school in Buchlyvie, Scotland, which had been opened for the specific purpose of preparing candidates for the priesthood who had not completed their secondary education. Con went to study at St Patrick's College, Buchlyvie, in September 1970 and by 1972 he had acquired enough credits to enable him to begin his training for the priesthood. He joined St Patrick's Missionary Society in September 1972 and completed the Spiritual Year in June 1973. He then proceeded to St Patrick's College, Douglas, Cork, for a two-year course in Philosophy. This was followed by a four-year course in Theology at St Patrick's College, Kiltegan. Con was ordained a priest on the 9<sup>th</sup> of June 1979, in St Mary's Church, Killamoat. The ordaining prelate was Bishop James Moynagh SPS, Retired Bishop of Calabar, Nigeria.

After ordination Con was sent to the Diocese of Minna, Nigeria. His first appointment was to Gwada where he served with Jim Noonan while learning the Hausa language. When he returned from leave after his first tour, he was sent to Zuru. His next assignment was in Bida and this was followed by a four-year term in St Michael's Cathedral, Minna. In 1990 Con took a sabbatical which included a Renewal Course at Gort Mhuire, Dublin, and a three-month module of Clinical Pastoral Education in Cork University Hospital. On his return to

Minna, he spent a short period in Our Lady of Fatima Church, Minna, before being posted to Kontagora in 1992. He worked at St Michael's Parish, Kontagora, from 1992 to 1997. He then worked for a couple of years in Castlerea, Co Roscommon.

He returned to Kontagora in 2000 and spent the following four years in St Peter's Parish, Bobi. After celebrating the Silver Jubilee of his priestly ordination in 2004, Con was appointed to the promotion team in Ireland. When he finished his term on promotion work in 2012 he went to work in the Diocese of Cork and Ross and was assigned to the Harbour Parishes. It was his home for the rest of his life. Con's life was cut tragically short on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of August 2021. As he returned to his car after lunch he was knocked to the ground by a bus which had careered out of control. His last act was to save the person beside him by pushing her from the path of the oncoming bus.

Con was a larger than life character who made a deep impression on everyone he met on the road of life. He was very light-hearted and full of fun and had his own unique sense of humour. He was very much a people's priest. Everyone was the same to him and any form of favouritism or elitism was totally foreign to him. He made great friends wherever he went and he invested very heavily in personal friendship. He loved his years in Minna and Kontagora and had a profound respect for the local people and priests. He watched out for people and was always willing to offer a helping hand and a kind word. No one was ever turned away from his door and no one was ever refused a place at his table. Many people who had no identification with faith or religion found in him a kind, compassionate and non-judgemental presence.

Con was predeceased by his sister Betty (Creed), his brother Pat (Bantry) and his brother-in-law Finbarr Creed (Dublin). He is survived by his brother Teddy (Borlin), his sisters-in-law Margaret (Borlin) and Mary (Bantry), his nieces, nephews and their families, his Society colleagues, brother priests of the Diocese of Cork and Ross, his colleagues John Galvin, Sr Rosarii Darby and Sean O'Sullivan and his devoted parishioners and friends in the Harbour Parishes, Cork.

*Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam uasal.*

© St Patrick's Missionary Society

## Priest whose wit and warmth drove his mission work in northern Nigeria

Much has been written and spoken about in regard to the positive impact Fr Con Cronin had on people's lives in the Harbour Parishes in Cork since he was appointed to Passage West in 2012. He died last week following a freak accident. Bus driver Mark Wills died in the same accident.

Fr Con was a member of the St Patrick's Missionary Society based in Kiltegan, and his priestly ministry began in Zuru parish in northern Nigeria in 1979 soon after his ordination. He struggled initially to learn the local Hausa language, but mastered it sufficiently to find himself at home in a new culture, helped by his warm and extrovert personality. He used his natural wit and humour to welcome everyone into his heart and world in a most respectful way. He had worked as a barman earlier in life and had all the banter and skills to put people at ease. Fr Con realised mutual respect is the bridge between all peoples. Early in the 1980s, I arrived in Zuru parish to learn Hausa along with three colleagues. I met Fr Con there for the first time. His affable manner made an immediate impression on me and we remained good friends. He soon moved on to become parish priest of Bida and later administrator of the cathedral parish in Minna township.

One of his many gifts was similar to the Franciscan way of hospitality, where no one is excluded. A motto of the St Patrick's Missionary Society is to "seek out the least, the last and the lost", which Fr Con took to heart. Last week, St Patrick's Society issued the following short statement: "Full of energy and fun, he radiated life and enthusiasm wherever he worked. Behind it all lay a very deep faith in God, who loves everyone equally. Discrimination and favouritism were foreign to Con. Con's way of evangelisation was through developing deep friendships and not the academic way of debate or argument. He lived the good news of the Gospels on a daily basis with a smile on his face and joy in his heart."

In the mid-1990s, a new diocese was established in the Kontagora area of northern Nigeria led by another Corkman, Fr Timothy Carroll, a member of the Society of African Missions (SMA). Fr Con volunteered

to help out, becoming vicar general (second in command) of the new diocese, a role he joked about as it did not fit easy on his shoulders. At heart he preferred to be a foot soldier. He set out to establish a new parish in a rural area called Bobi. He built a new mission house, and as few people were evangelised, Fr Con started a number of cultural days centred on tribal drumming and dancing. He loved Irish music and dance from his upbringing in the Borlin Valley of West Cork. On these cultural days, he would be found in the midst of the dancers, trying to learn routines — much to the amusement of the onlookers. Bobi parish is now thriving, with more than 60 outstations. Fr Con returned to Ireland in 2004 to engage with parishes in various dioceses on behalf of St Patrick's Missionary Society. In recent years, law and order has largely broken down in large parts of northern Nigeria, with armed Boko Haram Islamic militants, Fulani herdsmen and bandit groups extracting protection money from the civilian population. Kidnappings and killings are common, and Fr Con was heartbroken to hear of the suffering of people in parishes where he had previously ministered.

As has been stated elsewhere, one of Con's favourite sayings was: "Gratitude is the memory of the heart." We are grateful to God for the memories and humble witness to the truths in the Gospels by this humble priest, who endeared himself to so many people over the years.

*Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam dílis.*

© Fr Oliver O' Reilly, Sunday Independent, 8th August 2021.

## **Homily preached at Fr. Con's Funeral Mass**

There are events that happen in our lives which leave an indelible mark on us. Those of us who are older will always remember where we were when we heard that John F Kennedy had been shot and where we were when we heard that the Twin Towers had come crashing down. I think most of us will remember for the rest of our lives where we were when we heard about the tragic event in Monkstown last Tuesday afternoon which claimed the lives of our dear friend Fr Con and the bus driver Mark Wills. The sense of shock, disbelief and horror that we all felt will stay with us for many a long day. So many thoughts and feelings have swirled around our heads and hearts since that fateful afternoon. Why Con, why Mark? Why this terrible tragedy? We are left with so many questions. The outpouring of grief, shock and sadness has been extraordinary.

We gather today in St Joseph's Church, Coomhola, to celebrate Con's funeral Mass. This sacred place had a very important place in Con's life and it is fitting that it is here that we celebrate his funeral Mass, give thanks to God for his rich and eventful life and bid him a fond farewell. In this Mass we try to relate Con's life and tragic death to the death and resurrection of Christ. We try to situate Con's life in the wider context of the Christian mystery and the story of our salvation. We bring our pain and suffering and our sense of loss and bewilderment into the presence of Christ who knows what we are going through at this time. He too experienced all that we have gone through since those terrible events unfolded last Tuesday afternoon. Just like the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, Christ was familiar with suffering and acquainted with grief. He knows what we and the Wills family are going through at this time.

The Readings chosen for Con's Funeral Mass help us in our time of grief and pain to see the wider picture. We all know that our time on earth is short. We do not have here a lasting city. Psalm 90 puts it very well: '*Seventy years is the span of our days, or eighty if we are strong – and most of these are toil and pain. They pass swiftly and we are gone.*' But our Christian faith assures us that our life does not end in the grave. Death will not have the last word! Death is not the end; rather it is the door

through which we must pass in order to enter the fullness of life which Christ has promised us. And that fullness of life is presented as a lavish banquet in the First Reading: '*On this holy mountain, the Lord of hosts will prepare for all peoples a banquet of rich food, a banquet of fine wines, of food rich and juicy, of fine strained wines.*' It is our hope and fervent prayer that Con is already sharing in the divine life of heaven as described in the first reading. A place of abundance and plenty where there is no more suffering and where all tears have been wiped away and where the mourning veil has been lifted. And the mourning veil has hung heavily over the Harbour Parishes, over Ballincollig and over the Borlin Valley since last Tuesday. But we are quite certain that Con is already at home and at ease at this lavish banquet. During his life Con appreciated the importance of table fellowship. No one was excluded from his table. Like Jesus whom he tried so mightily to imitate he understood the importance of inclusion and of divine indiscriminate welcome. Hospitality was one of the many great qualities he practised in spades. All were welcome in his circle of friends and no questions were asked. He showed extraordinary generosity and kindness throughout his life.

The Second Reading taken from the First Letter of St Paul to Timothy is very well known and often read at Funeral Masses: '*As for me, my life is already being poured away as a libation, and the time has come for me to be gone. I have fought the good fight to the end; I have run the race to the finish; I have kept the faith.*' These words are very appropriate as we celebrate Con's life and commend him to God. His life was a life lived for others, it was poured away as a libation. He was generous to a fault. As the saying goes he would give you the shirt off his back. That was Con. He fought the good fight. And it was a fight. Everyone knows that Con – unlike many of his illustrious nephews and nieces gathered here today – never excelled in sport. But he knew what it was to fight for what he wanted and for what he believed in. He had to overcome many obstacles in order to realise his childhood dream of becoming a priest. The odds were stacked heavily against him in his youth. His mother's serious illness meant he was unable to proceed to secondary school after he had finished his primary education in Borlin National School. Being the youngest of the family it fell to Con to stay at home and be his mother's carer. And what a

wonderful carer he was. I heard a man say that the amount of good Con did during those years caring for his mother was more than enough for anyone's lifetime. That was some praise. No doubt it was during those years as he cared for his mother that the compassion and kindness which were the hallmarks of his priestly ministry were honed and perfected.

After his mother's death, Con was able to dream again about becoming a priest. But it was not going to be easy. There was a serious obstacle. Con had no secondary education. Most people would have given up at that point. But not our Con. No doubt there must have been times when he heard voices ringing in his ears saying: this is all folly. Look, you have a good job in the hospitality sector with good prospects. Be grateful for what you have. But Con did not give up; he battled on. Finally, a door opened for him. He was accepted at St Patrick's College, Buchlyvie, in Scotland, which was a secondary school opened by St Patrick's Missionary Society in 1965 with the specific aim of supplementing the education of young men who wished to become priests but whose secondary education had been cut short for some reason.

Con set off for Buchlyvie in September 1970. His father and his brother Teddy took him to the train station in Cork. As Con entered the train he turned and waved goodbye to them. On seeing his son board the train Con Thade whispered to Teddy: 'Wisha Teddy what will become of him?' In their wildest dreams they could not have imagined what lay before Con. Within two years he had gained enough credits to enable him to begin his studies for the priesthood with St Patrick's Missionary Society. It was an amazing achievement. And we in St Patrick's Missionary Society feel truly grateful today that Con overcame all those obstacles and persevered. He fought the good fight.

The Gospel reading from St John was chosen because it speaks about friendship and about laying down ones life for others. Jesus said to his disciples: '*I do not call you servants. I call you friends because I have made known to you all that I have learned from my Father.*' Forging friendship with people was Con's special gift. I believe that Con had a unique talent for friendship and he invested heavily in it. Stories about the number of people he knew in a parish are the stuff of legend.

Just look at the condolence section of his death notice in rip.ie There is a story doing the rounds these days that comes from his two years in Castlerea Parish in Co Roscommon where he ministered in the late 1990s. It is said that at the end of his time in Castlerea there were only two people in the parish whom he did not know – but they had just arrived in the parish that morning!

Con knew how to make friends and more importantly he knew how to hold on to friends. Friendship was the bedrock of his priestly ministry both in Nigeria and in Cork. He reached out to everyone. So many people have commented on this aspect of Con's personality: creed, race, gender or colour were not important for him. He treated everyone as an individual and helped everyone to be their true selves. He had the great ability to lift people's spirits and make them feel good about themselves. His rich, resonant and booming voice filled many a room and made people feel at home. He was a real tonic for those who were feeling down on their luck.

We can truly say that Con's life, like Christ's life, was a life lived for others. This was brought home very powerfully at the moment of his death. His last act was to push his friend from the path of the oncoming bus and thus save her life. Sadly he himself was unable to avoid the impact of the bus. And he and Mark lost their lives. Greater love than this no one has than to give their life for their friend.

Con has left us far too soon. We had hoped that he would be with us for many more years. He was still in his prime. He had so much more to give. But God's ways are not our ways. Con's death and Mark's death bring us before the mystery of life where bad things sometimes happen to good people. There are no easy answers. In the end we are called to trust in God still despite the difficulties we encounter on the road of life. We are called to entrust ourselves to the God whom Jesus revealed as loving, merciful, forgiving and compassionate. That is the God whom Con served so faithfully and whom he strived to imitate during his 42 years of priestly ministry.

Con would want us to leave this Church today with a smile on our faces and with hope in our hearts and return to our homes, our places of work and our communities and encourage those whom we meet

along the way. He would want us to watch out for each other, be kind to each other and lift each other's spirits.

I will finish with the final few lines of one of Con's favourite prayers called *Hymn of Hope*.

In our end is our beginning;  
In our time, infinity;  
In our doubt there is believing;  
In our life, eternity.

In our death, a resurrection.  
At the last, a victory,  
Unrevealed until its season,  
Something God alone can see.

*Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam uasal agus dílis. Amen.*

© Fr Tom O'Connor, St Patrick's Missionary Society  
St Joseph's Church, Coomhola, Bantry. 7<sup>th</sup> August 2021.

## *Our Parish Community remembers:*

### **I lost a friend this week.**

I lost a friend this week. Last Sunday we hugged and now he is gone. His last act one of love. I have read so many outstanding tributes reflecting on his life and understand the grief permeating the community. The loss is great but it seems the legacy is greater.

This week he is a man borne out in stories of love, laughter, music and dancing. A social connector. A generous provider. A friend. For me, Fr Con was all those and yet something greater. He was an orator and witness to Christ. Through his powerful expression He brought Christ into my heart and helped ignite my faith. He did not represent a merciless and unforgiving God; he instead related a loving God. Con's God, the God he spoke of so often, did not turn his back on those in need. He is a God whose love is limitless and boundless. A God who created laughter and dance. For Con, a God who deserves respect and consideration.

The life of the priest must surely reflect the teachings pronounced from the altar. If I speak of love, I will be love. If I speak of forgiveness, I will forgive. If I speak of suffering, I will help others navigate through their pain. For me, the priest is a vessel for God, an instrument through which the Lord works. Life is a vast often tumultuous sea. To hear a voice calling you or feel a hand pulling you from its waters is a work of God. Con was a voice and hand to many. The heart of my friend beat in time to faith. Con was a voice for Christ when I needed to hear Him talk. He was a body for Christ when I needed to feel his warm embrace. He was and will remain my friend forever, as inspiring a character as his many favourite authors. He spoke the Word and lived it. He was a warrior for Christ in life and arrives home bearing the marks and scars of a hero.

Fr Con was so much more than his duties. He brought so many into conversation with the Lord. His faith bolstered mine. He was my friend and I will cherish our last hug. May we all carry the light of faith forward and continue the work of one who knew and understood what it meant to be loved by God. Rest easy and sleep

well kind friend. May the heavens dance and sing in joy at your return and may you feel the warm embrace of all who love you, here and up above. You are loved and will be missed.

*'God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God,  
and God abides in them.'*

1 John 4:16

Rest in peace Fr Con. xx

© Susan O'Flynn, Monkstown.

### **I never knew someone who lit up a room so bright.**

I never knew someone who lit up a room so bright,  
Someone so loving throughout their time.  
Every step he took he left his mark behind  
And everyone here can say he changed our lives.

God takes the good ones that say,  
But I never thought he'd take this angel away.  
He'd want us to love and stay strong,  
But it's gets so hard knowing he's gone.

He'd turn around a bad day and make it good,  
Don't know how he did it but he could.  
Oh he's a hero to us,  
He'd make you feel loved, oh he'd heal your cuts.

God takes the good ones that say  
But I never thought he'd take this angel away.  
He'd want us to love and stay strong  
But it's gets so hard knowing he's gone.

God takes the good ones they say  
But I never thought he'd take our angel away.

© Clodagh Quirke, Passage West.  
Composed in the hours following Con's tragic death.

## **Physically and in nature Con was a big man with a big heart.**

I have been asked why there has been such an outpouring of grief and sadness in the Cork Harbour Parishes of Monkstown, Passage West, Ringaskiddy and Shanbally at the tragic death of Fr Con Cronin. The answer is simple. It was because of who he was.

Philosophy has referred to human nature as people in relation to each other, to society, to God and the purpose of human life. "Fr Con" or "Con", as he was popularly known in the Harbour Parishes, understood and appreciated human nature. At the musical 'Picnic in the Park' in Passage West, organised to bring the community together when Covid restrictions were eased, I was MC and asked Con, who was there – in his shorts – to help me get a bit of craic going. We started with me commenting on the display of his knees, to which he responded in his distinctive booming voice, commenting on my appearance. The ensuing laughter among the audience, several of whom hadn't previously ventured much outside their homes because of the restrictions, lifted the spirits as a community began to enjoy being together again.

"Kind, thoughtful, funny, confident in his life, able to make people feel at home when he met them" are among memories of Con expressed since Tuesday's accident. His life story of 72 years charts his journey from home in Kealkil, Bantry, to priesthood in the Kiltegan Fathers, missionary years in Nigeria, return to Ireland and becoming curate in the Harbour Parishes. During Covid lockdowns, I taught him to do podcasts in which he was frank and open about cocooning and how much he appreciated parishioner's support. He delivered wonderful insights on life as a passage through which community was vital. When that series concluded, he went on to "do TV" on the Parish Facebook Page, interviewing local people. That didn't surprise me! His "few dance steps" for children during a First Holy Communion Mass had gone viral on social media. On a St Patrick's Day, he dressed with a big, green hat at Shanbally Church. He could be serious, discussing difficult issues for the clergy, including the sex abuse scandal and abortion on the RTÉ TV documentary, *The Confessors*. His views on religion didn't necessarily tally with the rigidity of Catholic teaching.

His approach was “a breath of fresh air,” showing courage about treating people with understanding, consideration, humanity and dignity. My memories of Con are many, from meeting occasionally in village hostelries, where he would be enjoying a social get-together with friends. I rarely got the “last word.” He would always have a response! After Sunday Mass we often discussed the subject of his “chat” during Mass. And why do I not describe that “chat” as a Sunday “sermon”? There is a simple answer to that too – I never heard what I regarded as a “sermon” from Fr Con in terms of what is defined as a “discourse delivered by a member of the clergy about their religious conduct or duty.” I have an abiding memory of him at Sunday Mass in Ringaskiddy Oratory, where he would step down from the altar, sit on the back of a seat among the congregation and talk with – not just to – his parishioners, his people, discussing, seeking, and getting a response to issues he raised. They could be from news of the week, Mass readings or other topics of the moment. I would look on and think – isn’t that like the Church was originally meant to be? The priest, a man of the people, talking to his people, delivering a message, which Con always did, about society, God and the purpose of human life.

Physically and in his nature, a “big man” who had a big heart, open and available to everyone, he understood and “served the people.” The outpouring of grief in the Harbour Parishes shows how well he did that.

© Tom MacSweeney, The Echo, 7<sup>th</sup> August 2021.

### **To love another person is to see the face of God.**

I sat at my kitchen table early this morning staring at a blank sheet of paper wondering what I could say to you this morning. I had planned to sit down yesterday evening after Con’s funeral to try to find the right words but instead spend the evening with Con’s family in Borlin sharing stories and memories, celebrating the gift of Con’s life that we both shared, savouring the same warm welcome and hospitality that

we all so often enjoyed in Con's company. Even in death, Con was still working his magic, bringing people together and bringing a smile to our faces.

I eventually wrote down just a few thoughts:

Con's faith and his life were built on one firm and unshakable conviction – that, in the words of scripture, God so loved the world he sent his only son to be our saviour, the Word became flesh and lived among us. Con had many passions in life and he was especially passionate about "incarnation." He was utterly convinced that it is in and through people, through our humanity, that God continues to reveal Godself in our world. Con believed that the more we embrace our own humanity and respect the humanity of others, the more we discover and experience God in our lives. He was convinced that the mission of the Church is not to build up the institution, it is not about laws and morals, it is – in the words of words of Vatican II – about making the world more human: making it more human through our commitment to compassion and justice, through our capacity for friendship and community, through everything that brings joy and hope, comfort and meaning to others, whether that happens in a Church, a family home, a hospital, a local hostelry or walking the line. Con had an unshakable belief that we meet God in one another and that "whatever we do for the least of our sisters and brothers, we do for Him" [Matthew 25:36]. That was his inspiration, the wellspring of the extraordinary gifts that have been rightly acclaimed in recent days: his openness, his absolute refusal to judge anyone, his instinctive inclusiveness, his compassion, his integrity, his generosity, his humour, his willingness to be "daft" at times in order to make others smile. When Con met you, he loved you because he believed that in loving you he was loving God. He was absolutely convinced of that and, for Con, that single truth changed everything.

That for me is Con's great legacy. His life, his ministry, his spirituality, inspires us, dares us, challenges us to live our faith by helping to make life more human for everyone in our world, especially the

marginalised and the needy. In Victor Hugo's book, *Les Misérables*, he wrote '*To love another person is to see the face of God.*' Con believed that with every fibre of his being and tried to model his life on that belief. After all that is what Jesus did in the gospels. That is what the Church is supposed to be.

If there was one great sadness or pain in Con's life these past nine years it was the recurring revelations of where the Church had failed to do that, where instead of making the world more human, they trod on people's humanity and dignity, where instead of being the caring non-judgemental face of Jesus, they callously judged and mistreated those in their care. Con found that hard to hear. He was deeply ashamed of the terrible sins of the past and felt tainted by them. But he believed that we could be better, we had to be better, in order to be true to the call of Christ and because we owed it to those who have been hurt in the past. We do that by embracing our shared humanity and by being Christ to and for one another.

To achieve that Con was both brave and free in his approach. He wasn't weighed down by traditions of the past or 'the way we have always done things.' He wasn't afraid to try different approaches, to try new things. His instinct was to trust rather than to control, believing that the Spirit would guide us. Con often spoke of the Church as 'the people of God.' His years in Nigeria and the Church he witnessed there convinced him that we need to embrace a new model of Church where the people of God, men and women like all of you, are given real responsibility and real leadership, where the gifts of all are valued and respected and where the needs of all are cared for and tended to. By co-incidence, a few hours before Con's tragic accident, the diocese published the list of diocesan appointments. Neither Con nor I were been changed this year, for which we were grateful. It meant working together for at least another year or so we thought. But in those diocesan changes three parishes were being left without a resident priest and will now be served as part of a wider family of parishes. That reality is a frightening prospect for many parishes and for many priests, but it shouldn't be

for us. We should not be afraid of whatever changes the future may bring because Con has been gently nudging us towards a new vision and a new way of being Church for years. He believed that the Church belongs to the people and was convinced that if we trusted people and let them be the driving force, they could and would sow the seeds of a new Church.

Con taught us the importance of returning to basics and to focus on the truth that inspired him in his life: '*To live in love is to live in God*' [1 John 4:16]. May Con inspire us to be bold and brave and free in answering Jesus' first calling to each of us: '*Love one another as I have loved you.*' May Con's soul and the soul of Mark Wills, whom both served our community well, rest now in the peace of God.

© Fr Seán O Sullivan

Homily preached at Masses in the Harbour Parishes,  
Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> August 2021

## *A friend remembers:*

It was with great sadness and shock when I got text of the death of a long time friend, Fr. Con Cronin SPS. When as a Seminarian preparing for the Priesthood, I was posted to St. Michael's Parish in Kontagora, Minna Diocese, in 1995 for six months Pastoral Experience. I wasn't the first student to be posted to his Parish and I wasn't the last student to be posted to him. We understood each other and became good friends right from that moment of my pastoral experience. I found myself feeling much at home working with him.

I remember one day Fr. Con asked me if I could drive. I answered, yes, but with a provisional license and he then asked me to go and register for my full license, so that I could drive to half Parishes for communion service with the people. After the six months of the experience, I was transferred in February 1996 to St. Mary's Parish, Suleja, Minna Diocese. The friendship and communications continued between Con and myself, even after my Ordination in the year 2000.

Con, Mary and Siobhan visited me as a young Parish Priest of Fuka Parish. It wasn't long after their visit that I was appointed to join the Formation Team in Good Shepherd Major Seminary, Kaduna. This was when Con was preparing to return to Ireland for good in 2004 after 25 years in his ministry in Minna and Kontagora Vicariate. He asked me if I would like to come to Ireland to join him at celebration of his Silver Jubilee and spend my summer vacation there. When I came, I became part of the family, and I continued to come like a swallow during my summer vacation, helping in Coomhola and Kealkil.

Fr. Con was generous to a fault. He was a person with a larger than life character who made a deep impression on me and all who met him in his life. When I visited Con in January in preparation to travel to Nigeria, he gave me some stipends to share with some priests he knew when he was in Minna Diocese. He also gave me some vestments. The same thing happened when I visited in April. He gave me more vestments and some Nigerian clothes. At my last visit to him in June, before his death, Con gave me his old Mass Kit and the chalice

that was donated by his family at his ordination. With these, he kept telling me he wouldn't need them anymore. He felt I would need the vestments and vessels more than he did. It was as if he was handing over the mantle of ministry to me.

Fr Con was blessed with a very rich and resonant voice which helped to put people at ease. He was very light-hearted and full of fun and had his own unique sense of humour. I remember during the lockdown, Con became sick of it, because he was very much a people's priest. The many times I visited Con with friends, he treated them as his friends immediately. Everyone was the same to him and any form of favouritism or elitism was totally foreign to him. Con loved his years in Minna and Kontagora and had a profound respect for the local people, priests and religious. He watched out for people and was always willing to offer a helping hand to me and all those he met. His door was always open, no one was ever turned away from his door or refused a place at his table. As a member of his family, I want to extend my sympathies on the death of a dear friend and a brother. May the gentle soul of Fr. Con Cronin SPS, rest in perfect peace. Amen. Rest well my brother till we meet again.

Fr. Joseph S. Apust

### *A word from Con's family:*

We as a family always felt that Con was a legend, a man that represented so much of all that is good in our world. But this week, as we joined Con for his last goodbye to the parishes that he called home for the past decade, it was apparent to us that your loss was as great, if not greater, than ours. We cannot thank you enough for the outpouring of love we felt from the thousands of men, women and children that lined the streets of the Harbour Parishes to say goodbye. We would like to thank each of you for welcoming Con into your community and making him feel at home. He loved each of you and the time he spent with you. The loss is great but the legacy is greater.

The Cronin Family

## *The final word ..... Con on the meaning of life.*

When interviewing Con on the parish facebook page during lockdown, Jamie Long asked Con what, for him, was the meaning of life? This is Con's answer:

*If life is only all that's here, to me it's very empty and dry. It doesn't make life exciting. The idea that there is more to life than what we see here is the answer: it gives us a reason to live and, above all, a reason to die. That is the beautiful thing: there is a God, there is a creator, there is a creation and we are all beautiful creatures made in the beautiful image of God. That's my motivation to live each day.*

## Hymn of Hope

In the bulb there is a flower;  
in the seed, an apple tree;  
In cocoons, a hidden promise:  
butterflies will soon be free!

In the cold and snow of winter  
there's a spring that waits to be,  
Unrevealed until its season,  
something God alone can see.

There's a song in every silence,  
seeking word and melody;  
There's a dawn in every darkness,  
bringing hope to you and me.

From the past will come the future;  
what it holds, a mystery,  
Unrevealed until its season,  
something God alone can see.

In our end is our beginning;  
in our time, infinity;  
In our doubt there is believing;  
in our life, eternity,

In our death, a resurrection;  
at the last, a victory,  
Unrevealed until its season,  
something God alone can see.



