

Homily given by Fr James Walsh at the Requiem Mass for Deacon Ron, at the Church of the Sacred Heart, North Walsham, on Thursday 27 August 2020.

We have already heard a family insight into Deacon Ron's life and some of you will have read his biography on the diocesan website. I want to speak about the Mass we are celebrating this morning and what lies behind the words and ritual. Let's begin with the first reading we heard from St John which was chosen by Ron. It speaks of the love that the Father has lavished on us. Familiar words which often pass us by. Yet they are at the heart of our searching for God and God's searching for us. This dynamic allows us to claim the rights and the privileges of being children of God – and that, says St John, is what we are. I can see why those words spoke to Ron. Each of us is called to reflect in our words and actions that divine love which, as Dante says, moves the sun and other stars. Ron did that in his own unique way – as a husband and father, in his professional life and as an ordained minister of the Church. He embodied so well the primary role of a deacon which is to exercise a ministry of charity.

One of the aspects of Ron's pastoral ministry was his care of the bereaved. If I asked him to take a funeral, I knew that he would do more than preside at the service. He would spend time with the family, help them to plan the funeral ceremony and gently lead them to a Christian approach to the death of their loved one. St John goes on to say – what we are to be in the future has not yet been revealed. What we do know, he says, is that we shall see God as he really is. To see the face of God was not just a pious phrase for Ron, it was for him the purpose and goal of life.

Our understanding of death defines each one of us. For many death is final; it marks the end of a life with no prospect of any kind of future existence. It is not surprising that this mindset sees death as an unwelcome subject of conversation.

The Church gives us a different and infinitely more hopeful vision of death. It provides a kind of roadmap for the whole of our life that extends into eternity. It is centred on what we call the Paschal Mystery – the death and resurrection of Christ. 'Lord, by your Cross and Resurrection you have set us free' we will say after the Consecration. The death of Christ sets us free from sin; his resurrection opens for us a new life as adopted children of God. The Paschal Candle reminds us of this. It is a powerful symbol of the Risen Christ present at the heart of the Church and its liturgy. Our lives as adopted children of God begin at our first death which takes place at Baptism. This is when we die to sin and, plunged into the life of the Trinity, we rise to a new life of grace. The Church, as mother, accompanies to the end the child she bore in the womb of the font, the Catechism teaches us. It goes on to say: 'She offers to the Father the child of his grace, and she commits to the earth, in hope, the seed of the body that will rise in glory. The seeds of resurrection that are sown in baptism are watered by the sacraments and nourished by the eucharist'. In other words Christ, as Head of the Church, walks with us on our life's journey, and gives us a positive vision of hope that embraces our final Passover. You'll never walk alone, as we say in my native city of Liverpool, since we also make our journey in the company of our brothers and sisters in the family of the faith. This is what today is about. A funeral Mass is more than sharing memories – important though these are. For Ron the day of his death begins the fulfilment of his new birth in Baptism. The Church, who, as Mother, brought about his rebirth as a child of God, accompanied him in his life's journey and at the journey's end surrenders him into the Father's hands. She offers to God the Father the child of his grace confident that his body will rise in glory. This service reminds us that we live in communion with the one who has fallen asleep in the Lord and we pray for him and with him. At the end of the service today the Final Commendation will mark Ron's departure from this life and his separation from us. We ask God to purify his child of his sins and to admit him to the heavenly kingdom. Together with Ron's family we accompany him on his earthly departure asking the martyrs to welcome him and the angels to

lead him to paradise. For us death is the gateway into a new life with God when, as St Paul tells us 'I shall know as fully as I am known'. Ron, friend and co-worker, may you rest in peace and rise in glory.