

## **Paschal Burlinson - Diamond Jubilee 8<sup>th</sup> Dec 2009**

(Fr Eustace McSweeney-O.F.M.Cap former Definitior General of the Order)

1. What Paschal is celebrating today is primarily fidelity to God as a Capuchin for 60 years and God's fidelity to him. 'What is required of each individual' wrote the late Pope John Paul 11, 'is not success, but commitment to faithfulness' (Vita Consecrata, 63). He is a living witness to a total 'Yes' to God. How fitting that this celebration takes place on the Solemnity of Mary's Immaculate Conception! She has been the Model and inspiration in Paschal's life in a twofold way :in her total Yes to God's plan, of which we are reminded in today's Gospel and in her being placed before us, as today's preface reminds us, '--- to be --- our pattern of holiness' .
2. Paschal's Capuchin identity has been chiselled, refined, and polished in his sixty years of daily fidelity to his vocation. Capuchin life is a gift to the Church. It makes Gospel life present across time in bold and tangible ways. The chief apostolate of a Capuchin, our Constitutions tell us, is 'to live the Gospel life ... in sincerity, simplicity, and joy' (145, 2) The late Pope John Paul 11 in his 1996 Apostolic Exhortation on Consecrated life said ~'The world and the Church seek authentic witnesses to Christ' (109). Paschal is one of these.
3. He believes with conviction and passion in his Capuchin vocation. There are no doubts or ambiguities in his mind about it. No crisis of identity there. That is why he is able to live our Gospel life with such single-minded focus, such contagious enthusiasm and infectious joy. His joy is a powerful vocation advertisement.
4. Fraternal life is our primary Capuchin contribution to the Church. It is our first ministry. Paschal has a natural and acquired gift for fraternal life. He has a rare ability to lift the morale of a group. He has enlivened many a gathering of friars, nationally and internationally, with his quick wit, his love of a good joke, and his sense of humour. He is able to laugh at himself. Blessed are they who can laugh at themselves. They will never cease to be amused. He is a natural raconteur. Winston Churchill once said:" We make a living by what we get we make a life by what we give."

Paschal has spent his life giving, self-giving. He invented new ways of giving. The late Pope John Paul 11 said to Religious: 'Don't do what your founders did. Do what they would do today'. Long before that exhortation, Paschal was already doing it! He was a creative, courageous innovator. He wasn't afraid to take risks. Religious have always been a disturbing presence in the Church. 'Throughout history, consecrated men and women carried out a genuinely prophetic ministry, speaking in the name of God to all, even to the Pastors of the Church' (Vita Consecrata, 84)

6. Paschal accurately discerned the needs of the day and, with sound judgement, responded to them in a way that was novel and tailored to the need. In 1957 (over 50 years ago), he was the first friar in Britain to become a TV personality. Since then, he has made some 1,400 appearances on radio and TV. He had his own regular TV slot giving the epilogue on ATV Midlands. An accomplished broadcaster he is a renowned and powerful preacher, whose message is) relevant and succinct. In the sixties and seventies, thousands of people flocked to his missions each day, for two weeks, in the Capuchin Church in Cork. Those missions are still remembered. He is a man of the Word (the Word of God). As a consequence of his preaching, and his TV and radio appearances, he has personally received some 200 converts into the Church!

7. It is good for all of us to be here from so many different and distant places, from such a variety of vocations and age groups. All will receive much needed encouragement, hope and inspiration from this life-giving celebration. For the Capuchin students, Novices and Postulants, today is an integral part of your formation. The Capuchin Charism is a caught more than taught.

You will experience first hand, in the flesh, as it were, as distinct from the class room, something of Capuchin tradition, values, personal responsibility, commitment, fidelity, sheer hard work and youthfulness of spirit the person of Paschal. Our warmest congratulations and our profound thanks to you, Paschal

8. Paschal was the youngest guardian ever - aged. 30 - in the then English province. He is a figure of natural authority. He exudes confidence and ability. Consequently, he has been in positions of responsibility virtually all his life: Parish Priest, National Assistant to the SFO, President of the Major Superiors Conference, Guardian, Definitor, Provincial. As Provincial, for 8 years, in the post Vatican 11 period of change, he was a strong anchor in a turbulent sea. Now, at the age of 80, he is National Director of the Padre Pio prayer groups and Parish Priest here in Pantasaph. What a track record. He has always been a great people's friar. He is a man of surprises! He can pop up anywhere. He is even known to have won the National 'Best Beard' Competition!

9. Paschal is a monumental figure in the province of Great Britain, in the Church, and beyond it. Pity he cannot be cloned! But there is a bit of him in the millions of people whose lives he has touched. It was Cardinal Newman who said: 'the greatness of a person is not to be found in monuments but in the new textures and colours that come alive in others because of him'. That describes accurately the extraordinary, life-changing influence on others of our Diamond Jubilarian, Paschal Burlinson.