

## **Fr Charles Aylward RIP**

### **Thanks to the people of Fareham**

I know that Fr. Charles would want me to thank the people of Fareham. Charles retired here from Alderney in 1999. He was 75 and he had no idea what to do or where to go. I offered Charles a retired ministry and Fareham and told him that we would find him somewhere to live. He accepted and arrived here with a few books and his clothes. The people of Fareham took him to themselves and provided his furniture and everything he needed for his house in Portchester, not to mention providing him with affection and support up until his death at the beginning of June.

### **The Moresby Court Story**

As I said, Charles had no preference for accommodation when he arrived. He expressed a wish for a garden but there was no other expectation and he was happy to leave the whole thing to me. I began by thinking that he was ready for sheltered accommodation in the centre of town within easy distance of Sacred Heart so that Charles could celebrate Mass each day, a practice to which he was devoted. I found a flat at Moresby Court, the only one available and Charles flew over from Alderney to view it. On meeting him, I could tell that sheltered accommodation was not his first choice but he trusted me and went along with it. Then, and certainly now, I felt that Charles knew that things would turn out well and probably not as I or even he would have it. His trust in God, even in the simplest matters like accommodation, would bring the best possible outcome. I did not believe that God would overturn my well thought out plan for him to live at Moresby Court. How stupid I was.

**I shall never forget the visit.** The flat I had found for him was on the first floor. We waited for the lift, which took for ever to come and eventually the lift opened. A lady resident emerged from the lift carrying a huge laundry basket containing the un-ironed fruit of her afternoon's work in the communal laundry room. It contained her personal laundry and a coloured array of the more intimate items. Charles went bright red and hoped that the earth would swallow him up. As the lift ascended Charlie said that this was a lovely place but he would not want do his laundry in public nor would he wish to encounter too many ladies carrying their more personal items. We reached the flat which was large and with a westerly aspect. I could see that Charlie was pleased with its light and airy feel. He went to the sitting room and admired the view from the window. Charles called me over to share it with him. I went and my heart fell. The room overlooked Richard Coughlan's yard and we both watched as a coffin was loaded into a hearse. Since his entry into the Cistercians Fr. Charles had prepared to look death in the face each day. But he preferred not to live in that flat. So my plans fell into nothing and Charles eventually moved into the house in Sunningdale Road, Portchester.

### **Biography**

Charles Vincent Aylward went to the Cistercian College at Roscrea when he was 12 in 1936. During that time he discerned a vocation to join the Cistercians which he did by joining St. Joseph's Abbey at Roscrea when he was 17 in 1941. In 1947 he left Roscrea as one of the monks who travelled to Nunraw in Scotland to set up the Cistercian foundation there. It became Sancta Maria Abbey in 1948.

Here he was ordained to the priesthood on the 26<sup>th</sup> May 1949 and it was a privilege to be able to celebrate his 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary a few weeks ago with Maureen, his sister, and Clare McKenna and Leila Kroon. This was the day before he had the stroke which led to his death a few days later in Worthing Hospital.

At Nunraw he became assistant novice master and bursar. In 1968 he left monastic life at the age of 44 to continue his ministry as a priest in this diocese. He served as Assistant Priest in Crowthorne and Woolston and then as Parish Priest in Bournemouth, Copnor, Holbury, Hook and Alderney, retiring to Fareham in 1999.

### **Triangulation**

Triangulation, I think, is the term psychologists use to describe what happens to lots of Parish Priests. It is when a parishioner complains about a third party and does not speak to the person they are complaining about directly. Clergy who have other priests in their team may be familiar with the experience. **I only had one complaint about Fr. Charles.** It was soon after his arrival and it was about the fact that his silences after Holy Communion were too extended. I responded by saying that I thought that extended silences after Holy Communion were a good thing and that I was going to follow Charlie's example.

### **It is good to wait in silence for the Lord to save**

Fr Charles would have learned from his experience as a Cistercian monk that **'It is good to wait in silence for the Lord to save.'** I have to say that I am grateful to Charles as are many others for **the powerful spirituality which marked his priesthood** and which he unconsciously offered as an example to us all. His life was marked by a simplicity, austerity, poverty, love for solitude and silence and a generosity in prayer which certainly put my humble efforts to shame.

### **Thomas Merton: back to the complaint about Charles**

Fr. Charles believed with another Cistercian monk, Thomas Merton, who was born 9 years before him that **'we are to explore the inner wastes of our being in solitude and silence'** and that **'if you love truth be a lover of silence'**.

### **Silence brings a new penetration into the mysteries of God**

It is because the silence and prayer which Charles knew so well bring a new penetration of the eternity and truth of God and an understanding of Jesus which is a gift of the Holy Spirit, I would like to close by reflecting on the power and value of silence for Cistercians, for priests, for deacons and for us all.

### **Silence: Seeing Lord's presence in our lives**

It is in the silence of prayer that we come to see that the Lord is always present in our lives bringing us life, joy and peace

### **Silence: death and dying to self about entering more deeply into the life God intends for us**

It is in silence that we see how the horror of death and the pain of daily dying to self is transformed into a moment for change bringing us closer to the life that God intends for us.

**Silence: death is life changed not ended**

Through silence we truly appreciate that by being one with Jesus, the death which we shall all experience is when life is changed not ended. Then we shall come to human fulfilment which is a share in the everlasting life and love of the Trinity.

**Silence: coming to see that the risen Jesus is with us in every detail as we journey through life**

It is in silent prayer that we come to see that the risen Lord Jesus is with us in every detail of life from the anxiety of finding a suitable retirement home to the pain of illness and the burden of years and the final abandonment of death into the hands of God.

**In silence we learn that nothing can come between us and the love of Christ because he wants those whom the Father has given him to be with him where he is.**

As we pray for Fr. Charles today let us pray that our faith in the resurrection, our trust in the love and mercy of Jesus and our love which brings the presence and action of the Holy Spirit into the world, might be renewed and deepened.

Charles Vincent Aylward gave 40 of his 60 years of his priestly service to our diocese and to the Church. As we commend him to the mercy of God and continue our own journeys let us be guided by the prayer of Jeremiah as he was:

**'You have seduced me, Lord, and I have let myself be seduced;  
You have overpowered me; you were the stronger.  
Then there seemed to be a fire burning in my heart,  
Imprisoned in my bones.  
The effort to restrain it wearied me,  
I could not bear it.'** (Jeremiah 20:7-9)

Text of the homily given by Canon Paul Townsend on the occasion of the Requiem Mass at the Sacred Heart (Fareham) on 17 June for Fr Charles Aylward RIP