

Homily given at the funeral Mass of Fr John Guiney SJ

Our main purpose here today is to thank God for the life and work of Fr. John Guiney, to pray for his happy repose, and to offer our condolences to his relatives especially Edward, Michael and Carina and their families.

But is good too to recall how God worked in John's life and how he used John's great talents to further the growth of his Kingdom

I wonder what John thought, when, at the age of 33 he was given his first assignment in the finance and property affairs of the Jesuits in Ireland. In 1961, straight out of the final stage of Jesuit formation, he was appointed treasurer in Milltown Park Community with the added responsibility for overseeing the finishing off the red-brick building. I wonder did he think that was just a temporary blip in his life as a Jesuit. Or did he realize that he would never escape from that area of activity, from the world of money and property.

Every treasurer of a religious order must have some misgivings about the value in God's eyes of the work he is doing. The words of Jesus probably flashed across John's mind from time to time, you cannot serve God and Mammon. When I moved from the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice to the position of Province Treasurer, I used to say that I had to change overnight from being a socialist to being a capitalist.

I never saw it written down anywhere, but I am sometimes told that Jesuits at large are supposed to pray for their Province Treasurers, that is, for their eternal salvation, not for their investing skills.

There is a very pointed reference to poor Judas in the Gospels, that he kept the common purse. But if John Guiney had any misgivings about his role, they never showed, firstly because he was a very obedient Jesuit, and secondly because he was an intensely spiritual man who could happily apply himself to other very different roles that occasionally came his way, such as superior of his Community – effectively their spiritual leader, or when he gave retreats to religious communities.

In his deepest spirit I think he regarded the job of province treasurer as a side-line in his Jesuit life, even though it obviously took up most of his daylight hours. I think in this respect he was a bit like Flann O'Brien or Thomas Kinsella, whose identity was forged by their writing and poetry rather than by their full-time jobs in the civil service.

After I was appointed Province Treasurer in 2001, John met me one day and said, the most important thing in the treasurer's job is relationships. This struck me very much.

I would not have been surprised if he had said that the important thing was a daily reading of the Financial Times, but that was far from his mind.

John himself was a man who took great care to preserve good relationships with everyone he came into contact with, in the course of a day's work. This included in the first place his fellow Jesuits, and lay colleagues, but also bank officials, investment managers, estate agents, insurance brokers, solicitors and so on. People remarked very often on John's unflinching courtesy, even when he was not always able to be the bearer of good news.

When John began his work in the Finance Office of the Province, in 1962, he was firstly revisor, a Jesuit word meaning that he kept an eye on the finances of the different Communities.

He took over the Province treasurer's job from Fr. Bill Dargan in 1974. These jobs must have been very difficult when he started in them, because money was in very short supply. In 1962 there were 470 Jesuits living in Ireland, about 200 of these in formation. And there were another 200 Irish Jesuits living abroad on the Missions and in various other countries. John had a lot of steel in his character and he had to be tough with people to keep the show on the road. John often said to me, 'I never fell out with anybody about money.' On hearing this one Jesuit said to me, 'Well, he didn't fall out with anyone over money because everyone was afraid to ask him for money!'

John did not build up the Province Funds just by encouraging frugality. He was a very shrewd investor and looking back through the financial books it is remarkable how he transformed very modest amounts into sizeable funds.

He was also a very good negotiator. The story is told that he went to a garage to buy two second-hand cars for the Province. He haggled skilfully and eventually settled on a price. The dealer said, 'Phew, I am glad you were not trying to buy two Japanese cars because the margin is very tight on them.' John immediately perked up at this and ended up switching his purchase to two Japanese cars, and left the dealer with very little to show for his trouble.

John worked extremely hard but somehow never let the job overwhelm his humanity. He had great affection for his brothers, Tom and Eddie, and often spoke of them, and of the wider family, with obvious admiration.

In the Jesuits he was a great Community man and was always very considerate to his fellow-Jesuits, in an unobtrusive way. He loved good conversation and enjoyed a glass of wine or a gin and tonic, and a good film.

He enjoyed his camping holiday in France each year with his Jesuit colleagues, as well as holidays in Kerry. He organised these trips meticulously, leaving nothing to chance. He also enjoyed a game of golf.

When John finished up as Province Treasurer in 1993, he was asked to go to work in the finance office in our Head House, or Curia, in Rome. When John arrived in Rome he immediately concluded that community life in the Curia lacked a certain *joie de vivre*, but instead of moaning about it he set about introducing novel practices such as Friday night films and golf outings, and evening excursions to enjoy gelato. The older members of the Community in Rome remember John with great fondness.

John could have done many different things in his Jesuit life. He was extremely well read and was very good at languages. He had a gift for putting people at their ease. He could have spent his time in spiritual direction, or as a teacher, or as director of an apostolate, or as a parish priest.

No doubt if he had represented (that's a Jesuit word for kicked up) any dissatisfaction he felt about being always cast in the role of bursar he would have been given something else to do. But I think that John recognized that his work enabled many other Jesuits to work, to keep close to God, to stay healthy, and to grow old gracefully, and if he had other ambitions he was prepared to sacrifice them with the same consideration he showed in so many other ways.

May he rest in the Lord's peace.

Bill Toner SJ

20 November 2019.

Gonzaga College chapel