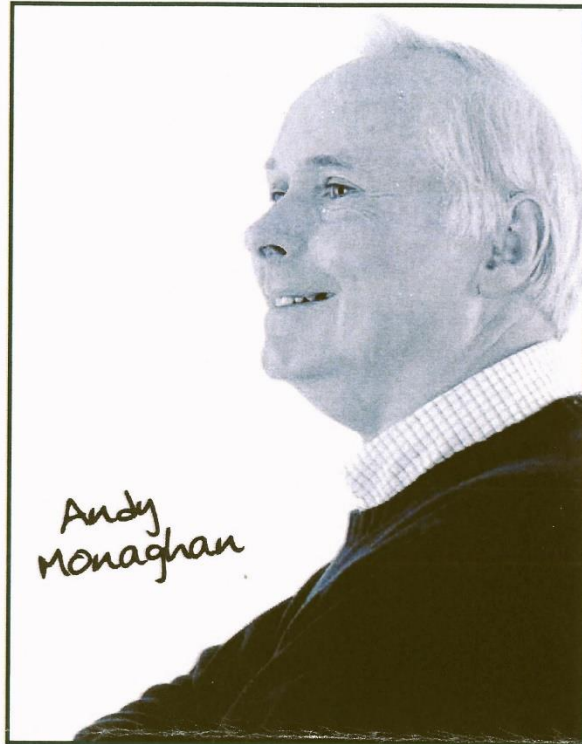


Last Thursday, 25 July, would have been the Golden Jubilee of Canon Andrew Monaghan's Ordination to the Priesthood - had he not died on 3 April, Easter Wednesday.

Canon Andrew was a good friend of our parishes, often - after his retirement - covering for Fr Jock when the latter was away.

Below is the Homily preached by Fr Jock at Fr Andrew's Requiem Mass at St Mary's, Bathgate, on 15 April.



A Radio Forth photograph of Fr Andrew (advertising 'Open Line')

We've just listened to the gospel story of the road to Emmaus, a story that's read one Sunday every three years and one weekday each year – and that weekday is Easter Wednesday, the day on which Canon Andrew Monaghan died.

The Emmaus story is a story about confusion and grief and finding faith and understanding through the explanation of the Scriptures, and in the breaking of bread. And so, it's extraordinarily apt that it be the gospel of the day that Andrew died; and it's only right that it should be read today, too, since in July, had he lived, Andrew would have celebrated sixty years of doing just that: explaining the scriptures and breaking the bread.

Indeed, as one of Andrew's close friends pointed out, it's even *more* appropriate because 'story' was his 'big thing' – the Gospel story, and the parable stories within it,

were - along with the Eucharist – at the centre of his life and his faith.

He was convinced that people learned so much through story – and how, if you really listen to it, you can identify with and learn so much from another person's story.

More than that - how drama, music and books are all really stories in their own right and can contribute in so many ways to *our* story and *our* faith.

Indeed, Andrew's extraordinary pastoral ministry, from which so many of us here benefited, was based on respect for each person's story - a story to which he would always listen intently.

But what of Andrew's *own* story?

I tried, in the introduction to this Mass, to give a brief overview of his eighty-two years. I'll now seek to expand on that.

He was born on the first of December 1941 in Simpson's, the second of four boys, a place and role with which I can directly identify; living at 3 Kirk Road; school in Bathgate till the age of eleven; many holidays with his cousins at Granny Reynolds' home of Crowhill House, near Westfield, three or four miles outside Bathgate, next to a farm. Then, life changing when he set off for Blairs at the age of eleven and, amazingly, to Senior Seminary at St Andrew's College, Drygrange, at the age of only sixteen, where he spent six years, from 1958 to 1964 - though ill health meant that the library was probably the place in which he was most likely to be found.

While at Drygrange, he had a very close relationship with Fr Karl Kruger, who was in many ways, a mentor to him, and who in time he helped to translate Karl Rahner from the German - which those of us who have read Karl Rahner's dense theology, are aware was some feat.

He was also always grateful to Fr Tam Hanlon for his biblical lectures, and for inculcating in Andrew a life-long love and knowledge of the Scriptures.

Andrew was ordained a priest on the 25th of July, 1964, aged twenty-two.

Seven years in parish ministry in St Francis Xavier's, Falkirk, was followed by three in St Cuthbert's, Edinburgh. During his years in Falkirk, he helped to set up a branch of the national Catholic marriage counselling agency - the Catholic Marriage Advisory Council (CMAC), as it was known then. He had close links, too, with the Carmel – and it's lovely that four sisters from those days are here with us today.

He also had a great love for music;

when he was in hospital this last December in the Western General, he received a card from a choir member at St Francis Xavier's, who wrote that the choir still had some of the original members from when Andrew, as a curate, had started it, before concluding: *"Thank you, from us all for instilling in us a love and passion for hymns and church music, during your time with us. We shall always be grateful for you."*

I mentioned how close he was to the Carmelites. But Andrew in time also had a good friendship with the Sacred Heart Sisters, whom he encountered at Craiglockhart, and the Daughters of Charity at St Joseph's, Rosewell.

Andrew's life took a decisive turn when, in 1974, he alerted Cardinal Gray to the fact that a local radio station was in the offing - eventually to be called Radio Forth - and offered his opinion that it might be a good idea to try to get some church or religious content into its schedule. He duly found himself hoist on his own petard as Cardinal Gray acted promptly and sent Andrew for broadcasting training at the Catholic Radio and TV Training Centre at Hatch End in Middlesex. Apparently, he didn't receive a particularly good report from there, but out of that experience and training came forty-five years of a second career, except it wasn't a second career, it was very much part of his priestly ministry and his priesthood.

One person, who was on that same course at Hatch End was Liz Barr - wife of Andrew Barr, an eminent broadcaster and, in time, head of BBC Radio in Scotland. Both Andrew and Liz would become good friends of Andrew, and especially when all three lived in Pathhead. Liz remembers vividly that while on the course Andrew made clear his intention of trying to connect up the broadcasting skills he was learning with his understanding of the Gospel, in order to help people in Scotland on the margins - this at a time of increasing unemployment, with the closing of the mines and the shipyards and the consequent spread of depression and alcoholism.

In 1975, he duly came back to Edinburgh and Craiglockhart College of Education, where he would spend ten years as chaplain and lecturer. *Open Line* would begin in 1979, *A View from the Earth* around the same time - with both of them running for over thirty years on Radio Forth, and winning many broadcasting awards.

Craiglockhart College closed in 1985 but Andrew continued lecturing, at St Andrew's College, Glasgow - till the early 2000s.

In 1985, however, he himself had moved to St Joseph's, Rosewell, remaining chaplain until 1999.

Again, he was much loved there, a love that was returned;

Brother Roland Walls, the hermit of Roslin,
and my spiritual guide at the time,
would normally celebrate Mass at St Joseph's if Andrew was away somewhere.
Roland would often then regale me with stories, of how when he'd start Mass,
he'd be interrupted by a loud voice, or voices, coming from the congregation -
"Where's Fr Andy?" – a question repeated frequently as the Mass continued.

Nor must we forget his fruitful ministry as parish priest at St Mary's, Pathhead -
from 1999 to his retirement in December 2016 –
where once more he was respected and loved, and, again, where he loved his parishioners,
and was deeply touched by their loyalty to and support of him.

While I believe that overview of Andrews's working life to be important,
I'm also aware that it doesn't really do justice to his pastoral ministry.
Andrew, I know, had as deep a love and sense of the priesthood
as any priest I have encountered, and a particular love for the Eucharist.
To how many of us has he said, "I'll offer Mass for you"
or "I'll remember you at Mass"?

And he was a particularly gifted preacher.
When Andrew was sent to St Joseph's,
Cardinal Gray said to Andrew's friend Gail, a Daughter of Charity at the time,
that he had a skill the Cardinal wished he himself possessed –
of saying all that was needed in a homily in three to four minutes

But he was a priest with a difference. There was a sense in which he rejected
the camaraderie of the brotherhood of the priesthood.
In a similar way he loved his family deeply but kept himself separate from them.
Among us priests, he had a reputation as a bit of a loner, not really one of us.
He seldom came to meetings or gatherings;
and probably unsettled us with the diversity of his ministry.

With regard to this, it was Gail who perceptively pointed out,
quite how infuriating Andrew could be -
since he made no effort to fit in with conventional social norms,
such as socialising for its own sake in any form,
or sharing everyday information about his own life.
In fact, as she observed, he seemed to enjoy
being deliberately annoying to – and exasperatingly reticent with -
those who wanted to know more about him, or who wanted to organise him
into becoming more like other clergy!

In contrast, people to whom he was ministering would experience a very different Andrew.
Indeed, he would make himself available - to anyone who needed support,
available in person, *listening deeply*, and available in letters and cards and telephone calls.
In some ways, this deep listening was his greatest gift.
He was someone who supported and encouraged any number of people –
approachable and personable, perceptive, and generous with his time.

Perhaps it's symptomatic of something that it was almost as if he had a dual identity –
Andrew was Andrew to his family and friends, and Fr Andy to the many people
to whom he ministered, ...or rather Andy if it was *Open Line*.

This latter involvement led to him becoming, in over thirty years of its broadcasting, one of the best known voices in Edinburgh and Fife.

Most of us here today probably live in a reasonably 'churchy' environment, but – as somebody who, I have to confess, never actually listened to *Open Line* - I was all the more struck when I was shown a little article in the *Fife Free Press*, sent to a friend by a Carmelite nun in Dysart who'd known Andrew in Falkirk. It had been written in 2014 by its editor, Allan Crow, whom, as far as I know, has no church connection or leaning, in response to *Open Line* being closed down:

'Hazel, Ron and Andy were part of my youth. At least, their voices were. Saturdays in Wester Hailes circa 1979 between midnight and 2am, you'd find a group of us sprawled on the floor listening to the Radio Forth trio take calls from people in desperate need of human contact and a friendly voice. It was compelling broadcasting. Back then there were no 24-hour superstores, no internet. TV shut down, pubs and clubs closed, and you were isolated.

One of the few constants was the voice of the late-night broadcaster – the airwaves a lifeline to a world that was otherwise asleep.

We'd listen to calls from wee drunk women who just wanted a blether after their inevitably "useless" blokes had fallen asleep in the big chair.

But then came the real cries for help. Victims of abuse, the newly bereaved howling with grief, alcoholics lost in a fog of booze desperate for a way out of the bottle,

and terrified folk who'd reached the end of the road.

Some had taken pills, others were staring into an abyss.

Listening to their stories, and the three presenters gently inching closer to gaining their trust, before trying to make an intervention was more powerful than any film or play you'll ever see.

The distress was very, very real, and they'd remain on the line for as long as it took. No adverts, no breaks, no cheesy jingles – and in houses across Edinburgh and Fife, folk sat and listened, hoping for a positive outcome. . . .

...The very mention of the show Open Line by Grant Stott at the Kings in Edinburgh the other week resulted in a huge wave of acknowledgement as an ultra-local audience instantly reeled off the names of those three presenters.

It's a testimony to the power of the spoken word, and to their ability to connect that, 40 years on, we can still hear them in our own memories.

The Open Line wasn't there for entertainment. It was far more important than that – it had real lifesaving, life-changing moments of broadcasting.'

Andy, or Andrew, faced a lot of opposition, vicious at times, and often from within the Church, as a result of *Open Line* - hostile questions about whether a Catholic priest should be *involved* in this kind of ministry:

Was it right that he allow himself just to be called 'Andy'?

Should he not be communicating Catholic teaching rather than listening non-judgmentally?

Years later, it's clear that in this ministry
Andrew was anticipating Pope Francis by several decades,
with the Pope's image of the Church as a field hospital,
and his encouragement of priests to have the smell of the sheep -
through reaching out to people on the margins
who wouldn't otherwise have any contact
with a priest or the Church at any point in their life.

And similarly, his work at St Joseph's and with St Joseph's service-users –
he had a real gift and love of those with learning difficulties,
again, a love that was mutual.

For a man who was gifted with such intelligence and communication skills,
Andrew's final illness was very cruel.

I was having breakfast with him on his eighty-second birthday
on Friday, the first of December, at the Beach House on Portobello Prom.
We had done this for nearly ten years, once a month.

As time went on a pattern emerged; I would order scrambled eggs on toast
and a cappuccino without chocolate, he would order black coffee,
and we'd exchange books – in other words, I'd hand over to him a selection
from my forays in second hand bookshops,
and he'd read - or rather devour - them at an extraordinary pace,
before at our next encounter handing them back
after communicating the essence of each one, and his opinion of it.

But during that birthday breakfast, I was taken aback
by his inability to remember somebody that I knew he knew very well.
After we separated, I checked out with another friend
who'd had a similar experience.

It was a few days later that Andrew, confused,
would say to her so poignantly, "*my brain is broken*".

Words were coming out in the wrong order
and emails he wrote didn't make sense.

Soon he was in the Western General,
and, after a scan, was faced by the terrifying diagnosis
of an aggressive incurable brain tumour.

Yet, even in his confusion, Andrew was still seeking to articulate
what he was experiencing through the eyes of faith,
as for instance in this poem, simply titled

Wednesday before Christmas

*Before Christmas celebration
brings individual expectation
as they wait for excitement
as possibility becomes real change.*

*Can change become happiness?
The time comes for the patient
to find the Doctors proclaim*

*what needs to change.
There is broken cancer.
Can this be explained and then challenged?
Can there be the ability
to return to Bathgate, Mass,
work in Edinburgh and then
walking the dog in Armadale,
and the work of counsellor
to ease the pain of the Scottish searches?
In this way I have to wait
for separate discussions
from the experts.
And wait for Christ to speak.*

I remember visiting him in the Western - and his first words to me, "I'm dying".

What it must have been like for him to face a terminal diagnosis, and know that, along with so much else, before he died, he, the great communicator, was going to lose the ability to speak, to write and to read.

But Andrew was always so courteous with the staff, always remembering to thank them.

And so brave. And as private as ever.

His brothers moved into action.

He was taken by James and his wife, Therine, into their own home, both of them showing such concern and care.

I tried to come every ten days or so with the sacraments.

That was all he wanted, really - there was no wasting time and little small talk, and, characteristically, I was gently sent packing once I'd administered them to him.

And he was nursed throughout with kindness and skill by Therine, and Rose and Jenny, her sister-in-law and niece, who backed her up when Therine herself fell ill.

And visited by good friends.

Throughout these months and despite his increasing difficulty in reading and speaking, Andrew continued to try to say Mass each morning, always at the centre of his daily routine.

And in the final week in March, he lived Holy Week, perhaps unavoidably, at a more intense and personal level than ever before.

But this Holy Week extended three further days for him;

by Wednesday morning of the Easter Octave – the morning of the Emmaus Gospel –

I could see when I visited that he was clearly dying, his brothers holding vigil beside his bed, James with a black and white picture of the two of them, aged nine and seven, in his hands.

Andrew finally, and after a long and difficult struggle, passed away peacefully that evening around 6pm.

Anne-Marie Fryer, one of his first year students at Craiglockhart in 1975, told me once about how Andrew had said Mass for her year group on the 25th anniversary of their graduation;

and of how he'd talked about the privilege of sharing with them
and of them being the group of students who'd trained and formed him.
She also mentioned that, whenever in the years that followed,
she'd lived through a bereavement, she would turn to him
and he would say of her deceased family member or friend,
*'From a place in heaven
they're still looking after you.
Love never dies'.*

Let's hope and pray that will now be our experience of Andrew.

I want to conclude with a poem
that Andrew wrote during lockdown, four years ago,
on Divine Mercy Sunday, the Second Sunday of Easter.
It says much about his spirituality,
and his belief in a God who gathers up
the light and darkness in each of us,
embracing our wounds as well as our achievements.

Divine Mercy

*In our frail and mixed-up human lives
mercy was seen as what is given
from the powerful to the weak.*

*In Christ, however, we are taught
that mercy is the love of God
which gives us life in all its richness,
embraces all our weaknesses,
transforms all our frailty
and surrounds our lives
from early learning
through good and bad decisions
to the final passing
that in peace or turmoil
opens out to that eternal joy,
which is life together
in the God who is the source of life,
and love and happiness.*

May Andrew be forgiven anything that needs forgiven;
may he be made whole where he needs made whole;
may he be reconciled with those with whom he needs reconciling;
and may he now be experiencing the fulness of life
together in and with our and his God,
the true and only source of life and love and happiness....