

FATHER FRANK'S LOG: 10th – 17th MARCH 2024

This will be the final log until sometime after Easter as I have to travel to Ireland next week for meetings, and then come back into our first Holy Week serving two parishes, the parish of St Mungo's and the parish of St Roch's. Even now, trying to finalize the programme for each location, and allocate the various ministerial tasks and roles, is proving quite exhausting, so I can only imagine how it will be when we enter into the preparation and celebration of the ceremonies themselves. As Voltaire, or whoever it was, once said, *the perfect is the enemy of the good*, and so we will strive to do our best and leave the rest up to the Holy Spirit.

I met up with some long, lost, but not forgotten friends last Monday for a bite to eat. The occasion was to reconnect with someone whose wife had, sadly and unexpectedly, passed away a few weeks before. Theirs was in fact the first wedding I ever celebrated, while I was still a deacon, back in 1983, so I can happily say that my first wedding was long-lived, lasting over 40 years, although I wish it had been given the chance to be longer-lived. The wedding took place at our Passionist Retreat House at Coodham, in Ayrshire, in the beautiful chapel that was there. One of the resident Passionist Community celebrated the Nuptial Mass, and I preached and received the vows. It was a great pleasure and privilege to do so, and I subsequently baptized both of their children, and enjoyed many visits to their home. In more recent years, however, we lost touch, as is the way of things, and it came as a great shock to hear of this sad bereavement. It was good to meet again and reminisce about the great times we had together, especially our holidays in Barra, before he got married, and before I joined the Passionists. The stories never lost anything in the telling, as you can imagine, although, quite alarmingly, I think that they were all mostly true. I suppose we were all young and foolish at one stage. We parted, vowing to meet up again soon, and I hope we do.

As I compose this log, Father Gareth and Brother Conor are preparing to head down to the Passionist Retreat Centre at Minsteracres, in order to represent our community at the funeral of Father Mark Whelehan, who died aged 96 on 29th February, just the day after celebrating the 70th anniversary of his ordination as a Passionist priest. Father Mark was synonymous with Minsteracres, so much loved by all who came there over the years, and the very heart and soul of the place. I remember when I was asked to set up the North European Novitiate in Minsteracres, back in 1992, that he was such a welcoming and encouraging presence there, even though the novitiate was bound to disrupt the normal running of the Retreat Centre. He was genuinely delighted to welcome me and the 6 novices. Apart from his normal priestly duties, there were two things that Father Mark loved to do. The first was to run the little shop for retreatants where you could buy sweets and chocolate, various holy objects, and a very well-chosen selection of spiritual books. He had a way of making people part with their money and he took great delight in reporting how much profit the shop had made for the running of Minsteracres. Mostly, however, he just loved getting people into the shop and chatting to them. There was no quick escape. For that same reason, he also loved to run a little bar for resident retreatants in the evening, once the work and prayer of the day was over. He created an atmosphere of warmth and friendship, which led to a great spirit of sharing. Even after my time with the Novitiate in Minsteracres was over, whenever I would return to conduct a retreat, or to attend a meeting, it was great to catch up with him again, and even on those occasions, I ended up buying stuff from the shop that I never really wanted or needed, but he was too sharp an operator to resist. He will be incredibly missed, but the blessing is that he died in his beloved Minsteracres, without having had to move to a care home, which had been looking increasingly likely in recent times, as his health and his quality of life diminished considerably. May his good soul rest in peace.

As ever, protect yourself, your loved ones and others, and protect Christ in your lives.