

Homily

Sandhurst Jubilarian Mass 2023

by
Monsignor Peter Jeffrey

It was an exciting time to be ordained – July 1963. Bishop Stewart invited Bishop Thomas to come over from Geraldton to ordain me at Sacred Heart Cathedral. My family appreciated that since my paternal grandfather was the layman who was with the then Monsignor Thomas on the Backhaus Estate.

At the ordination, Bishop Stewart also imposed hands and then discreetly left to travel to Wangaratta to ordain John Ryan and the late Kevin Howarth. Part of the Ordination ceremony for a Diocesan Priest is to pledge obedience to the current Bishop and his successors. So, our Priestly life and Ministry unfolds.

It is providential that John is a Priest of Sandhurst. He grew up in Mildura in the Ballarat Diocese. However, his father's employment as an Insurance Agent, meant that the family moved to Wangaratta. John has always loved Ned Kelly country.

For John and myself, it was an exciting time to be ordained. "*Sacrosanctum Concilium*" the Constitution on the Liturgy had been promulgated on 4 December 1963. I remember being quite excited on the last day of that seminary academic year, when Archbishop Guilford Young spoke with his customary vigour to the seminarians, after the Bishop's Trustees meeting about the Council – particularly about his contribution to "*Sacrosanctum Concilium*" the document on the Liturgy. When I got back to Sandhurst, I heard that Bishop Stewart got Monsignor DeCampo to pick him up at a back door of the Airport to bypass any journalists who may be looking for a comment on the Council. When he got back to "Genazzano" he said, "Nothing has changed"!

The different episcopal responses mirrored the varied reactions of the lay people to documents that came from the Second Vatican Council. It took quite some time before all were in-step journeying on our pilgrim way.

However, all of us can say as we heard in the passage from 2nd Corinthians – "*We are only the earthenware jars that hold this treasure,*" to make it clear that such an overwhelming power comes from God and not from us.

When we listen to the gentle prompting of the Spirit we do not know where we will be led. From the Cathedral Presbytery in McKenzie Street, John found himself on the way to further study in Rome and then to St. Louis, U.S.A. On his return, He was the co-ordinator of the Priests' Renewal Programme in Canberra.

In 1999 he helped establish the *Humanita Foundation* which aimed to stimulate renewal in the Church's understanding of human development and sexuality. So many of our confreres have benefitted and grown from participation in these special programmes.

As we heard in today's Gospel, "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many". John, you can look back on the countless priests who have been challenged to change and grow in their path of discipleship, or as Pope Francis so often says, 'missionary' discipleship.

I grew up in a Catholic family in the Cathedral Parish in Bendigo. Sadly, I was knocked back when I applied for the Seminary. The reason was that one of my father's brothers suffered from epilepsy. It was thought that there was a risk that I might have an epileptic fit during the Consecration in the Eucharistic prayer!

Being 'knocked back' I began the enrolment process to do Law at university. I wasn't very excited about it. Although, as a kid in short pants I went to the Law Courts in Bendigo to hear Frank Galbally represent a man who slaughtered a man with an iron bar outside the old Post Office in Shepparton. Riding my bike home, I recall asking myself, "Was that verdict right or wrong?"

Bishop Stewart's Priest friend (Harry Jordan MSC) was a Canon Lawyer. Happily, he found a footnote in one of his books which said 'epilepsy' could now be controlled. So, the path to Corpus Christi College was now open.

I have worked in four Parishes in Sandhurst – Cohuna, Beechworth, Heathcote and Shepparton, before being asked to go to the Seminary at Clayton. I had no idea that this would lead to being Rector of three Seminaries – Melbourne, Fiji and then New Zealand.

Fr John's book "A Priesthood Imprisoned" highlights our need for on-going conversion. I have had a blessed and joyful life as a Diocesan Priest but still need to move more from the 'head' to the 'heart'!

Fr Rob Galea's special ministry shows that the journey from heart to the head is much easier than the other way round. Furthermore, as Fr John's reflection shows, our journey will always be in the direction of greater trusting love in Jesus as Lord of our life (Cf Acts 10,36).



A Toast to Diamond Jubilarians

by
Monsignor Frank Marriott

In asking you to honour our 1963 Diamond Jubilarians I would like to place the Priestly service of Peter and John initially in the context of the Decade of their Ordination, 1958 to 1965, the five years before their ordination, and five years after.

That decade began with what turned out to be a bombshell for Church and for many, the Priesthood. The aged, cuddly, and seemingly simple Cardinal Roncalli was elected as Pope. Despite continued opposition, the windows he opened have never really returned to the previous shut and fixed position.

That decade ended in 1968 with quite a bang.

The Paris student riots encouraged, it is chronicled, the Future Pope Benedict to hurry back to the Roman Sacristy, the murder of Bobby Kennedy added to the turmoil created by the ongoing Vietnam war protests, and then we in Church, were called to manage the Encyclical '*Humane Vitae*', a continuing challenge even today.

In that decade, Sandhurst ordained 28 Seminarians from Corpus Christi College and St Francis Xavier in South Australia. Six resigned active ministry, three are alive and in various states of health, and all are here today.

Following the early 60s example of Peter Quinn, some nine of that group served with distinction in PNG, Fiji, New Zealand, the Philippines and other Pacific Areas. Many found themselves in seminaries, a number acting as Rectors or staff members. A number were active as reserve Military Chaplains, with John White leading, as the Air Force Principal Chaplain. Peter Jeffrey holds I think, the National record as being the only Priest in Australia to act as Rector of three seminaries.

Further, a number of this cohort held Positions with ACBC; Maurice Duffy heading up the rewriting "Come Alive" Catechetical team, and John Ryan as Director of St Peter's Centre for priestly renewal.

Not a bad contribution for a small country Diocese.

Peter began life in Bendigo, schooled at St Marys Convent until Grade 4, Marist Brothers and then on to St Patrick's, Ballarat, where he distinguished himself as a debater, winner of the prestigious Purton Oratory speaking prize in 1955. He was a prefect; that possibly helped his earlier roles in Seminaries.

John, recently living in Wangaratta, found Assumption as his secondary school and had a distinguish sporting career, Tennis, First XVIII, athletics and debating and also a prefect.

In between Fiji and NZ, Peter accepted roles as Parish Priest in Euroa, and Shepparton, found time to lead the Diocesan Education Board and serve on the CECV. He chaired the First Inter-Faith Council in the Diocese as well as serving as Dean and in the other standard offices.

John meanwhile, was receiving accolades for his work with the Centre for Christian Spirituality, in Sydney, followed by becoming Director, Oceanic Office, Centre for Human Development, then on to Centre for Ministry Canberra and, finally moving to Centacare, Canberra.

The Centre for Human Development raised eyebrows, Human Development was unheard of back then. The current upcoming Synod amongst other tasks is concerned with how our knowledge and teaching can be lived and applied in the changing conditions of our time. Peter often tells of his own growth in coming to realise the importance of Human Development in the task of seminaries. He found soul mates in this area during his stint at Holy Cross. John's work in this area bore fruit years later.

Whereas Peter seemed to flourish in Parish Pastoral life, John preferred office hours. This is perhaps illustrated by ... you knew who was on that phone, whereas ... I will get back to you!

For a moment reflecting on the mysterious paths that we now identify as God drawing straight paths with different materials ...

Peter and I were both born in Bendigo, went to the same schools, but never consciously met until after Ordination.

John caught up with me at Kilmore and finished a year early. Again, we did not meet until after Ordination.

I landed in Shepparton in 1971, found myself sitting at the left of Monsignor Bones with Peter on the right. One day I was ordered to sit at the Right hand ... I was a year older in ordination. Not much attention to Consultors detail that year.

On the other hand, John and I arrived at the Cathedral in 1974 full of Vatican II zeal, particularly desirous to bring in the sign of peace. In those days, the station Church was St Pius X at Long Gully. The locals were a little bemused at the antics of the young assistants and one day they told us, "You won't last here". They were right. John moved to Myrtleford and I to Heathcote on 20 July 1974.

Peter and John, two fine priests who have served the Church and People with distinction in those varied fields wherever the Spirit led them. Always Spirit lifters, not Spirit crushers. No matter where they roamed, they always called Sandhurst home.

Many of us gathered today would not have experienced these two men in full flight. Articulate, (though I did find some of John's published works a little difficult), spiritual, hardworking, and respectful of their congregations.

Each has contributed significantly to the Big Church and assisted in the development of our wonderful Diocese.

We thank them for their long years of fruitful service.



On Sixty Years of Priesthood

by
Fr John Ryan

While I was working in Wangaratta, (before going into the seminary) I met a Hungarian refugee called Bella Brestovski. He was an architect who had come to Wangaratta after being in several refugee camps in Europe and beyond. He took a shine to me and I to him and he had a considerable impact on my life. One day we were walking along Murphy Street on market day, down the road from here, when he stopped and said to me, Jorn (he always called me Jorn) look at all those people. In all of them there is a story. Some will be told. Some will be written, and some will never be told. That encounter has stayed with me, even to today.

Whichever way we look at it, whether we appreciate it or not, whether we know it or not, in faith we have a story within us and ultimately it is the story of God in our lives.

Today I want to share something of my story. I am known as John Ryan. My mother's name was Alice Johnson known as Johno by some of her friends, so I'm told. When I was born someone suggested that I be called Johnson. We were a fairly insignificant family in the desert on the edge of the Mallee, so imagine how different my life might have been if I had been called Johnson and not John! It goes without saying that my parents were not particularly imaginative. They named their three children Mary, John, and Bill, but it kind of fitted the ordinariness of our lives.

When I was ten, we moved to Yarrawonga and I still remember the surprise among the local boys when I met them and they said, "You can't be John Ryan, we already have a John Ryan." He was known as Oscar, so I became Oscar II. For the first time I was becoming aware of how problematic my name could be.

At age 13, I was launched into boarding school and there I had five years of many transforming experiences. During those years there were at least four or five John Ryans and some were in the same year! This was a problem on many fronts, not the least being laundry bags, so that's where I became John E. Ryan, the E stands for Edward which was my father's name although interestingly he was always known as Ned.

Following boarding school, I went to university with many of my friends. This came to be a time of deep questioning concerning my future, concerning becoming an engineer, or a priest. Ever since I was 11, I had known that one day I would have to test the call to the priesthood.

Eventually I went to the Seminary for the Diocese of Sandhurst. Here the name Oscar followed me because some of the guys from school were at the Seminary, too. At my first appointment as a curate at Yarrawonga, there were three or four John Ryans in the parish! Believe it or not!!

However, there was another John Ryan in the Diocese, he was John S. Ryan. He was very significant because he was, amongst other things, the Inspector of Schools. (He would never tell his confreres what the S stood for, so they decided it probably stood for Sennacherib, so he became known as Snaky. In fact, it stood for Simeon but for some reason he was reluctant to tell them that.)

While I was in Yarrawonga, I had done some work with young people on, shall we say, the wrong side of the law, and so I developed a reputation for working with troubled young people as well as alcoholics in the area.

When I was at the Cathedral in Bendigo, I happened to be in a group one day and was taken aback to hear Snaky exploding about the police knocking on his door looking for Fr John Ryan. I didn't realise my reputation has followed me. However, this did not please him at all. I received a huge amount of angst from him about the confusion of our names. So once again my name was becoming an issue.

Early on in my time in Bendigo, I came to believe I was destined to become the Bishop's driver/secretary, although the thought scared the pants off me. That was until I backed the Bishop's car into a tree on our first outing! Things changed dramatically from then on, thanks be to God!

Later, as a student in Rome, the director was keen to know what my Saints name was for my feast day. I didn't have a clue so all I could suggest was John the Apostle as my feast day.

When I came back from America it was assumed that I would take up a specific situation within the Diocese, but that situation had changed by the time I returned.

Being a part of this Diocese meant that I absorbed Bishop Bernie Stewart's, vision for the Diocese. He always had a vision for the larger church or the global church. He allowed his priests to go out when they felt called and welcomed priests who wanted to come into the Diocese.

After coming back from overseas I was appointed to Myrtleford – a great time as well as a time of personal challenges and huge upheaval. In my story, chapters came thick and fast. After a year and a bit, I was appointed to Wodonga.

After a year in Wodonga, around 1977, I was invited to go to Sydney by Cardinal Freeman via my bishop, to work with David Walker (now Bishop David Walker) to establish the Centre for Spirituality.

Then in 1980 I came to Canberra to research and establish the St Peter Centre. On each of these journeys I was commissioned by my Bishop at the time, and I always felt I went with the Bishop's blessing. Wherever I went I felt very welcome and forged relationships within those dioceses, but I always said I belonged to Sandhurst. At times there were invitations to become incardinated elsewhere, including overseas, but that was never an option for me. I never ceased to be a priest from the Diocese of Sandhurst.

1985 through to 1993 was a tumultuous time, a time when I dreamed of programs, places and people who could help assist the lives of the diocesan priests in Australia by providing resources of all kinds. At times it seemed as if we were almost there, then it seemed as if we weren't!

Firstly, there was Vince Dwyer's Centre for Human Development, during which programs were introduced into the dioceses who chose to take part, programs like the one-to-one, and support groups (many of which are still going today). This morphed into the Ministry to Priests Program. During this time Directors for Continuing Education were appointed in nearly every Diocese and they would meet regularly to discuss the issues they faced. Jim Gill SJ (an American psychiatrist) came to Australia and would talk to us about all the issues we were facing. These were heady days and it seemed as if my dreams were taking shape. Then in 1993 the Bishops took over this vibrant going concern and as often happens in such cases, it seems to me the movement has slowly died on the vine and my dreams with it. Perhaps it was inevitable, perhaps not!

Eventually I became ill and was forced to retire, but my life was prolonged way beyond what was expected. But no matter where I was, or what I was doing, my identity, my heart, was always with Sandhurst. I may have lived elsewhere much of the time, but I always was and always will be, John Ryan (if need be John E.), **a priest from the Diocese of Sandhurst.**

In the words of the great Dag Hammarskjold,

"For all that has been, Thanks. To all that shall be, Yes."