

# Brother John Southworth fsc (1936 - 2007)

Fr Vincent Doherty

*Fr Vincent's opening words at Br John's Funeral Mass.*

Brother Alban Mc Court will give us a fuller insight into the life and achievements of Brother John<sup>1</sup> towards the end of this Requiem Mass, but I would just like to reflect for a few moments on the man John, that especially Brothers James, David, Gerard, Alan, Maureen and George Warren and I as the Chaplain to the Community knew at 3 Nelson Road.

He was by nature shy, almost an introvert, very sensitive and self effacing, with a dry sense of humour and a man possessed of a deep and simple faith and of gentle devotion. He had a fine intellect, ample abilities and talents and you had to be very sure of yourself and your facts before you contradicted him. But he was always gracious with his opponents. He would at all costs avoid the limelight, if it were at all possible, to say nothing of Governors' meetings!! He would easily shrug off any compliments with the words, 'Oh, anyone with any common sense could have done that.' But in lots of his achievements for the community, it was not just his common sense, but his hard work, steel determination and sheer will power that brought things to fruition. When he took over as Director, he didn't know how to cook, but armed with cookery books, he soon became a very fine cook and we all enjoyed the fruits of his culinary skills and this in itself brought him happiness. He undertook the refurbishment of the house with the zeal of a Zealot, as he wanted his fellow Brothers and other Lasallians to enjoy what was and is now a very comfortable home.

But what made John the man he was?

I think it was passion and passion is a wonderful thing. For it is passion that brings a person to life. And if you want to know someone then you have to find out what is his or her passion. You have to know where their heart lies and what fires them. And of course that was not difficult to do with John.



But having a wild passion is not enough, for passion alone can make a person fanatical and we know only too well what a fanatic can do. The passionate heart must be tempered by the warm hearth. And the hearth for John was not of course a fireplace. In fact John had two hearths and they very much complemented each other.

His first hearth was his strong and devout commitment to living the life of a De La Salle Brother. Prior to his joining the DLS he was a Brother of Mercy and was a very fine and accomplished teacher especially at their school in Highgate, London. As a De La Salle Brother his commitment and dedication to the Congregation was unquestionable. He had a simple but solid prayer life, that sustained him in moments of joy and disappointments, in supportive and stressful relationships, in struggles and in continuous recommitment to his vows, and this was borne out by finding him in the chapel, hours before Holy Mass was to be celebrated. He lived simply, with very few trappings of comfort in his room. And probably what he valued most in that room, was his statues of St John Fisher and Thomas More. He was as you know, baptised John Fisher and one other of his brothers baptised Edmund Campion, after his father. His devotion to the English Martyrs came to him at an early age and this was nurtured both at

<sup>1</sup> See the November issue of Lasallians

home and especially at Preston Catholic College. He was an avid reader and able to retain much of what he read. His spiritual reading at the time of his death was a book by Abbot Jamieson of Worth Abbey. He was reading the chapter on detachment when he was called to leave all behind and go to the Father. His ultimate act of detachment.

He had a capacity to love and enjoy life, loved his sport, but especially cricket. I used to tease him and say that cricket was like watching paint dry. He had a great trust in divine providence, even when it was not easily understood, but trust in God he did. A glimpse, a touch could be a window to a soft spot in his kind heart. This was not always apparent, but when it mattered, it was there and it was felt by the likes of you and me.

His other hearth was his passion for hospitality. Yet John might not have thought that passion for life, friendship and hospitality were very spiritual things, but they are at the heart of the Christian message. Much of Jesus' teaching took place at meals and on occasions of hospitality. Jesus was a man of tremendous passion. Passion for what was right, passion for what was just and passion for what was good.

I read somewhere that sin does not reside in passionate and throbbing hearts, but that sin resides in hardness and coldness of heart. John certainly could not be accused of the latter. He loved having Brothers from the different communities come and stay and he delighted in cooking for them and making sure there was something 'spiritual' available to them in a glass. I emailed Br Jose Marino in Spain to tell him that John had died. Jose had stayed a year at 3 Nelson Rd whilst studying English. He wrote back expressing his sorrow and

offered his condolences to the community here and at The College. But in the email he said something rather striking about John and I quote: 'He was my beloved director' and that word 'beloved' speaks volumes to us. The Lasallian Day in January was always a high light for John, simply because it gave him joy to see the Brothers together and enjoying themselves, alongside other members of the Lasallian family and friends.

The great thing about passion is that it helps us to rise above the petty squabbles, disappointments and the irksome bits and pieces that are so much part of the fabric of all our lives. And I know that John, like the rest of us, had his fair share of ups and downs, pain and losses and loneliness and in the past months, ill health. But again, it was through his passion for living, loving and hospitality and his strong faith as well as the support of his Community and friends, as well as the excellent nursing care of the staff here at Clayton Court that he was able to pass quietly, gently and lovingly two weeks ago, into the arms of our Eternal and gracious Father. He now of course enjoys the best of hospitality, that rich banquet on God's Holy Mountain, where all the Lord's faithful servants will be housed, cared for and fed.

Passion for his Religious life, a big heart full of love, hospitality, generosity and a deep love of prayer and Holy Mass are some of my memories of John and each of you here will have your own special memories and so remember him, as I will at the altar of the Lord with love and affection.

Eternal rest grant unto him O Lord and let perpetual light shine upon him. May he rest in peace. Amen.