

## Fr DAVID O'BRIEN OSB

1925-2014

DAVID HERBERT O'Brien was born on 22 January 1925, the only son of Dr Tony O'Brien and his wife Una; his mother sadly died when David was only one year old. With remarkable foresight, as she was dying she asked that a diamond she cherished be kept aside to be mounted in a chalice for David when he was ordained. His father kept this to himself until David's ordination when he presented him with the chalice which David used at his first Mass and frequently throughout his life.

His father remarried and David enjoyed a happy childhood with six siblings at their family home in Lytham St Anne's. Following school with the Jesuits at Preston Catholic College, David volunteered for the Royal Navy. In the pre-invasion bombardment of Normandy, David's ship shelled the coast for 24 hours which he always felt was the prime cause of the deafness, which gave him increasing trouble throughout his life. David's active naval service took him later to the Adriatic and the far east.

After the war, he worked for four years in a family insurance broking business in Manchester and enjoyed the work, in the course of which he became engaged to be married, but, aware that he was battling with a calling to priesthood or religious life, his fiancée very supportively broke the engagement to enable David to try his vocation. She later married someone else but stayed in touch with David.

Nine men entered the Ampleforth community in September 1950 with another joining a little later towards the end of October. Seven of the ten were to persevere in the monastic life until death: now just Fr Dominic remains among us. It must have been a somewhat strange experience entering the noviciate for a mature man. Fr Dominic relates that when he arrived in the noviciate a little later than his contemporaries, David set himself the task of discovering all about his fellow novices and in the process built a brotherly relationship between them. David loved celebrations and was delighted to find that, in those days, the monastic community celebrated major feasts by drinking a glass of port after lunch. One rather austere fellow novice asked him, "Did you know we were going to drink port on feast days?" clearly hoping for an equally austere reply. But David was typically joyful, "No," he replied, "Isn't it wonderful!" Though the other novice did not persevere to profession at Ampleforth and later joined a more austere community, he kept in touch with David for the rest of his life. In the noviciate David also had to share in the noviciate runs. These runs were made more penitential by the

fact that the bath after the run would invariably be cold because the boys had used all the hot water after Rugby. David struck on the notion of filling the bath with hot water before going for his run so that it would be just right when he returned. A clever idea — but it might have helped to turn the taps off before leaving the monastery...

As a mature vocation David was ordained somewhat ahead some of his peers in 1958. He served locally in Helmsley and Kirkbymoorside before being sent out from the monastery to our missions in 1963. In his time on the missions Fr David served in Grassendale, St Mary's Warrington and Cardiff before moving to Parbold as parish priest in 1973. He retired from Parbold in 1990 and moved first temporarily to Lostock Hall and then to Browndedge, Bamber Bridge where he was to remain until 2013 — aside from a shortish interlude of four years which he spent in the Abbey between 1996 and 2000 undertaking some retreat work and serving Helmsley parish for Sunday Mass.

David's family was always important to him and he valued the contact and family events. He would celebrate an annual Mass for deceased relatives always followed by a good meal.

People, Christ's people, family, brethren, parishioners, friends, mattered to David and he loved being with them. A notable example of the care he gave to people was his devotion, while at Browndedge, to his role as chaplain to the nearby St Catherine's Hospice. As well as his personal care for the patients, he raised substantial funds for the hospice by doing, at the age of about 70, a sponsored walk from the Cumbrian coast to the North Yorkshire coast (Wainwright's Coast-to-Coast route).

David's interests were many and varied — and he continued to have an inquisitive mind into advanced old age. In his younger days in Warrington he was an enthusiastic member of Lions International. Their non-denominational approach- to serving the community evidently appealed to him greatly and he immersed himself in this work, serving in 1972 as the President of the Warrington branch. During his time in Parbold he undertook a renovation of the Church there rewiring the Church, installing new lighting and heating, creating a day Chapel at the back of the Church and reordering the Sanctuary. He served in the wider life of the Archdiocese when he was appointed Dean in the Ormskirk deanery in 1977. After his "retirement" in 1990 he simply changed his activities: he was devoted to visiting the sick, to promoting interfaith dialogue and to supporting deafened people. He fought his own steadily progressing deafness with a great variety of different gadgets each one of which was designed to help him make the most of the little hearing he had. He kept active until at last the deafness made it impossible for him to hear what was going on around him. Latterly this became a major

cross for him because he felt sadly cut off from people — for people were at the centre of David's existence, they brought him to life.

He returned to Ampleforth in September 2013 when it became very clear that he needed the nursing support that the monastery infirmary can provide. It was a big wrench to move from his beloved Lancashire back into this rural monastery, Still it did not take him long to befriend our carers and to make himself at home here. For as long as he was able he continued to involve himself with those whom he met — and he was still able to go in his wheel chair to the Remembrance Day service outside the main entrance to the school on the 11 November. About ten days later, a small stroke in a vital part of the brain precipitated the pneumonia which led to his final illness and death.

Alban Crossley OSB

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