

# Fr Barry Ryan Funeral Mass

## Homily

*Fr Kevin Arundell*



In 1992 the musical anthem of the Barcelona Olympic Games became known and loved across the world. Sarah Brightman and Jose Carreras sang “Amigos Para Siempre”, friends forever, friends for life.

Over the last week I thought about that song, as I’ve met so many people who wanted to speak about Barry Ryan as a friend, and as a friend for life.

Those friendships with Barry for many, were often forged in the groups that he arranged. Veronica described so well Barry’s skills in ministry, skills that enabled people to experience together, the presence and the power of God. And I want to share with you one brief example of how that happened.

In the late 1970’s Barry, fresh from a leadership course that he had completed in his studies, set-up a group in Ballarat that he called a Co-Counselling Group. We were a cross section of people, about a dozen in number, and we met for an hour and a half every second Friday night. The purpose of the group was to demonstrate how we could be healers to one another, healing life’s hurts by simply listening, with a gospel ear, to one another.

What we found at each meeting was that someone in the group had something they wanted and needed to talk about, hurts in their lives that they’d often covered over, so people expressed feelings right across the board, one with feelings of rejection, another dealing with loneliness, one dealing with bitterness, another with jealousy, and the rest of the group listening, under the guidance of Barry, seeking to bring healing to each of the people as they talked about the woundedness and hurts that they had experienced.

This is but a brief example of Barry’s skill in enabling growth and change to happen, in the lives of so many people, and also for the group together, with a gospel focus, to experience the power of the risen Christ in action.

A little insight into an event in the very early years of Barry's priesthood. It happened, and this might surprise you, that Barry was reported to the Bishop by his Parish Priest for preaching heresy. By and large Bishop O'Collins, knowing the parish priest well, generally disregarded the report, but he did call Barry in to talk to him. I met Barry soon after his interview to see how he got on. Barry said he had a friendly exchange with the Bishop. I asked, "Did he give you any advice?" "Well," he said, "He did give me one bit of good advice." "What was that Barry?" "He told me to play golf every Monday !!!"

Barry lived with a real concern for his brother-priests and especially for the priests of our diocese. He made clergy gatherings in the diocese a priority in his life and never missed his support group get-togethers.

As a Vatican II priest he was concerned for all of us that we keep up with on-going theological education and that we ensure that the Christ we preach is the Christ of the gospels. Barry often talked about his concerns that we be a church with meaningful liturgies and relevant scripture-based homilies.

In all of these areas, in his anxieties and concern for the church of the future, he never lost heart, and Paul's words to the Romans were special to him that "nothing can come between us and the love of Christ, even if we are troubled or worried or even attacked."

That music "friends forever/friends for life" describes a reality for Barry. In so many areas Barry was a friend for life - in parishes where he served, in groups with his classmates, to priests across Australia and in his loyalty too, to those who left the priesthood. Barry was (as one tribute has expressed it) a lover of people forever reaching out as a friend. Mind you, as his friends, we would often have to listen patiently to his never-ending agenda about the things that he might do some time...,"I must do that sometime....I'd like to do that" were two of his most used sentences.

In the course of his life, as you know, Barry never rushed into anything and that was true too, when he came to face the reality of his death. It seems appropriate today, when we speak about friendship, that so many of his friends, through their visits, phone calls, text messages and prayers, responding to Barry's friendship, were able to help him come to terms with, and accept the inevitability of his death, enabling him to hear clearly the call of Christ.....Come to me all you who labour and are heavy burdened and I will give you rest.... and you will find rest for your souls.

In all our speaking of the goodness of Barry Ryan and our respect for him, perhaps we should take care that we don't make him a saint too soon. Barry could be stubborn and the moment I said that word stubborn, I had a mental picture of the four Bishops he served under, when they heard the word stubborn, all nodding their heads in agreement, politely of course.

And a little story about pride in Barry's life. Barry was very proud of his family and his family background, and proud of the Ryan name. On one occasion at a clergy gathering (I think it was the 25th anniversary of his ordination), Barry was making a speech and declared that he was making a big statement....he announced "all Ryans are related". That night we reminded him of a few Ryans who, to say the least, had sullied the name Ryan. The next morning he said he'd like to add one word to his big statement and he announced, "Not all Ryans are related".

And speaking of sainthood, I think you have to produce a couple of miracles before you are taken seriously as a candidate for sainthood. My second name is Thomas, but Barry, if you can arrange it that your beloved Geelong can win the premiership this year, then I'll begin to believe that you are a genuine candidate for sainthood.

Returning to the song, "friends forever/friends for life," there is a line in the song towards the finish that says simply, "There has to come a time, when we must say goodbye". So goodbye, old friend, Barry, from all of us here, from those too, watching through livestream, and those unable to be here.

We thank God for the gift you have been to us.

We thank you for being a friend forever, our friend for life.

And now we commend you to the eternal friendship of God.