

Funeral Homily

The Rt. Rev. Dr. Martin Mate

12 November 1929 - 28 November 2023

By Bishop Sam Rose

Today, we find comfort and hope in the ancient words of wisdom and guidance from Holy Scripture. Bishop Mate selected our Bible readings in preparation for this day. As in life, our Bishop would point us to the eternal truth and Promises of God in Scripture to build up our faith and trust, so we reflect on how he is still doing so at his Funeral today.

The Book of Wisdom reminds us that the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and our departed loved ones are safe and secure in the divine hands of our loving Creator.

Paul emphasizes the transformative power of faith and the promise of resurrection in 1st Corinthians, as we are assured that our departed loved ones have shed the limitations of this earthly life and embarked on a new journey, free from pain and suffering, forever embraced by God's love and mercy.

The Gospel according to John recounts the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. Jesus proclaims, **"I am the Resurrection and the Life. Those who believe in me will live, even though they die, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"** (John 11). These words offer us hope and comfort in the face of death. Faith promises us that even in times of sorrow, death is not the end. Rather, it is a transition to life eternal, where our departed loved ones find peace and everlasting joy in the presence of the Holy One.

We see wisdom and hope in these verses selected by our late Bishop, for even today, he still teaches us much about the Christian life and death. But that should come as no surprise, as Bishop Mate was, for us, a builder of faith in the lives of so many.

In his Obituary, which the family so lovingly wrote, it says this about Our Beloved Bishop:

"To others he was 'The Bishop', but to friends and family he was Dad, Grampy or Martin. Having learned from his father, who was himself a master carpenter, shipbuilder and fisherman in Port Rexton, Dad was able to and did build or assist in building, repairing and renovating houses, boats, churches and sheds with a high degree of skill in several trades, he enjoyed the Newfoundland outdoors. He had great knowledge, experience and love for many parts of Newfoundland and Labrador. Perhaps most importantly, he showed us all how to live with honesty and integrity, a sense of humour and how to pass with grace and dignity."

The skills that Martin learned and acquired in his early life from his parents, especially those of a builder, certainly equipped him for the life that God was calling him towards - that of a husband to Florence and a Father to Carolyn, Elizabeth, Phyllis, John, and Carl. And to his life in the Church as a deacon, priest, and as our Father in God, our Bishop. The Bishop was as comfortable with a Bible and a Prayer Book as he was with a hammer and a saw.

Bishop Mate was a builder. Whether building a Cabin or building a Diocese, he had a plan and the skills and gifts to put it in place. His God-given gifts were foundational for Martin's vocation to his family at home and his family in God.

In our Diocesan life, we often take for granted that our identity - how we worship and express our spirituality - has always been the same. Not so. We are the inheritors of a rich and living tradition that comes from those in the past willing to take risks in faith and to step out in leadership. Bishop Mate was indeed an example through his gifts of leadership in the building of our Diocese. Here are but a few tools in his toolbox:

Bishop Mate was dedicated to building **Spiritual Renewal** within the Diocese. He understood the importance of a personal relationship with God and worked to foster spiritual growth among the clergy and laity. In particular, he played a significant role in advancing Anglicans in Mission, the Cursillo Movement, Teens Encounter Christ, and other ministries that seek to strengthen and deepen one's faith. Bishop Mate's leadership in this inspired countless individuals to renew their commitments to Christ and embrace a deeper connection with their spiritual lives.

Bishop Mate's leadership in **Church Renewal** is equally profound. He recognized the need to establish new parishes to accommodate the shifting population and to ensure that individuals had access to vibrant places of worship. Through his vision and leadership, Bishop Mate spearheaded the building and establishment of the Lavrock Centre and several new parishes in the Diocese, offering welcoming places of worship and fellowship for all seeking solace and community within the church. He even lent his skills with a hammer and saw on more than one occasion to ensure the work was done.

Additionally, Bishop Mate was passionate about **Liturgical Renewal**. He recognized that worship should be a meaningful and transformative experience and thus played a pivotal role in introducing the Book of Alternative Services (BAS) within the Diocese. The BAS provided a fresh perspective on liturgy, embracing a more inclusive and participatory approach. He stressed the importance of making Holy Baptism not a private act but a part of the Sunday public worship. Bishop Mate's commitment to liturgical renewal breathed new life into our worship services, allowing individuals to engage more deeply with their faith and experience a profound spiritual connection.

Moreover, Bishop Mate understood the importance of renewal in **Theological Education** for clergy and laity alike. He took great strides in reopening Queen's College in the 1980s, ensuring that clergy and laity had access to a quality theological education. Bishop Mate firmly believed that well-trained and educated clergy and laity were vital for nurturing the faith

of the community. Also, the growth of Lay Ministry was a priority through the Lay Minister's Association, Life in the Eucharist, Professional Lay Ministers, Lay Eucharistic Assistants, youth delegates to Synod and other lay ministries. Through his efforts, countless individuals received the resources and training to exercise the ministry of the whole people of God.

And our Bishop also had an awareness that ministry is ever-changing and evolving as the needs of God's people change and our understanding of the human family develops. He made calls for the Church to respond to Social Justice issues, not to hide away from them - calling the Church to reach up to God and reach out to others in God's world.

In reading his words from one of his Charges to Synod in 1983, he spoke words that are as relevant and necessary today as they were 40 years later. Our Bishop said:

"We must be forever conscious of those who are victims, those who are hurting and in need of help. Acting together we can do so many things....as a Church, we must listen to those who are hungry. We must listen to those who are unemployed. We must listen to those who are bound. We must listen to those who are broken. We must endeavour to sit where they sit. To them in every way we can, the Church community must be a supporting community using, with other Churches, whatever influence we can to correct the situations in which they find themselves. "We being many are one body in Christ, and everyone members one of another." (Rom. 12:6)."

At one time, it was unimaginable to believe that a female would be called a Priest in the Anglican Church. Martin was one of the first bishops to ordain women to the Priesthood, and also his leadership and advocacy for women to the Episcopacy. We are blessed today that through his leadership and building up of faith, he has helped shape the Church to be more inclusive and welcoming of all people seeking a relationship with God.

Yet, in all that Bishop Mate built and led us in this Diocese, it was not about himself. His life and ministry were built on the foundation of Christ, and he constantly pointed others towards Jesus. His humility exemplifies John the Baptist, who pointed others to Christ when saying, **"He must increase, but I must decrease."** And like Christ, our Bishop surrounded himself with gifted clergy and lay people who worked together in building up the Kingdom of God in this place. His life in Christ helped so many others discover their own relationship with God and discipleship of Jesus.

As the late Dr. Tom Pope said in his oration given on the occasion of Bishop Mate receiving his Doctor of Divinity degree from Queen's College in 2009, and I quote:

"Perhaps the essence, the very core of an individual's handiwork, is found deep within the person himself. This is especially true when one has to work, and achieve through so many other people. That would certainly be the case of a person who serves as Bishop. Those who work closely with Bishop Mate describe him as a most unassuming leader, so much so that he naturally empowers those around him."

While we can say much about his building and leadership in our Diocesan life, I want to say that his life as a Husband, a Father, a Grandfather, and a Friend cannot be understated. He and Florence built a beautiful, loving family - the five of their children becoming remarkable people in their own lives and professions. And for all his Grandchildren, what a joy it has been for you: Evan, Olivia, Bethany, Matthew, Melanie, Samson, Gabriella, and Lucas to have Grampy be part of your lives and careers. Looking at all of you, I can only imagine the pride and joy your Father and Grandfather had for all that you are and have done in your lives. He was so proud of you. And in his own brief words, which were related to me by his dear close friend, Father Rueben Hatcher, when he spoke about the achievements of his children and grandchildren, Martin said, "Well, they turned out all right," - a few words that spoke volumes about his love for you all.

So, in our thanksgiving for Bishop Martin - a builder of faith and our Diocese, let us conclude as we began with Holy Scripture - as our Bishop would want - so that we know and trust that all of our lives - here and hereafter - are in God's loving hands. Our lives and faith are built on this eternal promise as found in these words of Jesus: **"I am the Resurrection and the Life. Those who believe in me will live, even though they die, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die."** And then, Jesus turns and asks, **"Do you believe this?"**

Bishop Mate said "yes" to this eternal question, and His invitation today is the same for us. Martin built his life in service to God and God's Church and helped so many others discover their faith and build their lives on the foundation of Jesus Christ. Today, although saddened by our loss, we have hope, and we thank God for Martin - a Bishop in the Church of God and a builder of family, friendship, and faith in this Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland & Labrador.