

## **Wheat and Darnel**

This weekend marks the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my ordination to the Roman Catholic Priesthood.

I am a servant of Christ

Thus a servant of the Church, even with all its faults.

The Church that despite its faults has proclaimed the Gospel for two thousand years  
Indeed the Gospel that is proclaimed today is wonderfully appropriate for such an anniversary.  
There is much to be grateful for in forty years of work, plenty of wheat planted in faith which has  
bourn rich fruit.

There has also been times of stress, fault, and failure. Like Darnel growing up amidst the wheat.  
Christ calls us to take up the cross and follow him, so in a life lived, the reality of the cross must be  
recognised and accepted as a part of the vocation.

Thus lodged in my memory is the occasion I carried a new born still birth baby from its mother to the  
mortuary.

Thus I carry the mental scars of periods of depression when my faith seemed to be the only sense in  
my life.

That said realities such as these have served my ministry.

The grief shared with the family of the child has in part moulded my capacity for compassion  
The pain felt as a result of irrational mental illness has humbled and therefore strengthen me  
To tear out this Darnel from my days would be both impossible and foolish.

But there has been wheat

A harvest, a crop sometimes one hundred fold, sometimes thirty, sometimes twenty.

A life of prayer has meant that

I have served in Bolton where newly ordained I lead a group of youth running the Manchester  
Marathon.

I have served in Rochdale where I took a group of sixth form students to a man who had served in  
the first world war trenches, and wanted them to remember his brothers.

I served in a Xaverian sixth Form and organised a show involving students in the first red nose day  
Then perhaps the greatest blessing of my life, my time in Kenya, East Africa, where my heart  
remains.

Returning after a brief period of study to Highercroft, Our Ladys. I served and we had great fun.  
Especially with those who did not directly identify with the faith, but did identify with the work of  
the Parish. For example good people who helped me collect and service Bicycles, which I saved and  
distributed on Christmas eve.

Then perhaps the least successful and shortest ministry in Moss Side Manchester. But despite  
internal opposition work was done, the Gospel preached.

Then on to Burnley where a conversion took place. Impossible as it seems this Old Manchester United fan switched allegiance to the Turf and the Clarets. Fourteen years with love, and kindness, and community.

And so here I am in Darwen still on the journey. A life begun with a naive commitment to poverty, now living in two huge houses.

A life where still the people of God are good to me. Where you teach me, where you feed me, and where we together maintain the traditions of faith so essential to our spiritually poverty stricken society.

Jesus set up the community of the Church

Throughout these forty years mine

has been a life of prayer

Throughout these forty years

mine has been a life of service

It has not all been wheat

Yes there has been Darnel

The good with the bad

And I would do it again, but set down

This set down

This; was I lead all that way for

Birth or death, there was birth certainly

I have evidence and no doubt

And death, many things have come to their conclusion

And I am not at ease for there is much still to be done

But after the gift of my exhausting life

I should be glad of another death.