

St Mary-le-Bow Cheapside, London EC2
the Funeral of Raymond Charles Duffy RIP

The Revd George Bush, Rector

Friday 20 March 2020 at 11.00am

The deeply unfortunate delay between Ray's death and these his funeral rites means that I have had unusual time to hear comments about him – altho' rather less reminiscence because he was – and of his age – deeply private. One repeated statement was that he was 'part of the furniture here'. Of course in the ecclesiastical forum, the wardens are duty bound to keep an inventory not of the 'furniture', but of the 'ornaments' – and we know that in the third century, St Lawrence, asked by a persecuting Roman governor to come up with the 'treasures of the church' simply gathered the indigent, the sick and the frail and announced them to be the treasures, the ornaments, the furniture. For me the irony is that he preceded all the furniture here today; beginning his time with us in the hut church that was adjacent to the burnt out shell of these walls. But truly he was one of our ornaments.

Ray would himself be profoundly nervous about being spoken about because he was both modest and very unassuming. In the world of social media and instant celebrity we have lost the valuation of crafting a good life which is without fuss or attention; for many of us there is nowhere to hide. Yet courtesy, integrity, goodness and silence can issue in a refined and generous life that we miss at our peril.

Ray was a quintessential City person – if competent in tasks that probably no longer exist; as I understand it a stockbroker's clerk (with W.I. Carr, Montagu Loebel Stanley, Save and Prosper and J.P. Morgan), inhabiting naturally a world of exactness, politeness and service; always in work and never late. On no occasion did I see him not wearing a tie; and a couple of years back I offered to help him in the garden at least as much to see if he wore a tie to weed and to mow – I suspect so. He made his home in Dagenham with his brother John, whom he cared for until his death two years ago, but it was perhaps in the City that he obviously belonged and latterly, with few friends, this place was his home and the Thursday Eucharist his watchword of loyalty. Attendance here has little logic but at one stage Ray was the only person at the Thursday Eucharist for some weeks and I made it clear that I had no intention of stopping that Service. If he thought I might, he didn't say so; although one churchwarden knew to her cost the risks of attempting to do so during the last vacancy – Ray was not pleased.

In this respect Ray embodied a critical ingredient in Christian living – faithfulness. Nowadays there is little sense of liturgical obligation, and not much of loyalty and yet our religion is not expressed in how we feel, or how a service has moved or bored us, but rather in the loyalty and faithfulness with which our conviction is practiced over time. Ray got this wholly; and with courage and I suspect a certain stubbornness he was here come rain or shine until very recently. His presence was both personally warming – for he loved this place – and encouraging; when we published the parish history I realise now that it was quite a compliment that he was content, especially with the more recent content. For example, I was puzzled that there was no record of PCC meetings in Fr McCulloch's time knowing that Ray was an elected member. 'Oh', Ray said, 'he never actually let it meet'. We probably should have garnered more anecdote. But if private, perhaps even a bit solitary, Ray was not friendless. He had two especially dear friends, met decades ago on a walking holiday in Switzerland and to whose house and company he repaired at Christmas, Easter and the summer months. He and his brother John shared a passion for photography (this was news to me) and had been granted a rare licence to cine photograph the seasons at Kew Gardens in the 1950s and Kew had lately enquired if the remarkable film could be transferred to DVD.

Each of you will do your own judgement of Ray – which will not be like God's which is always guided by his mercy. To which mercy and love we, with gratitude and affection now commend him. For Ray, Easter has come early. May he rest in peace.