

OP dinner – June 2011.

Fr Teddy, Headmasters past and present, OP staff, present colleagues and OPs going back to the dawn of creation...

My grateful thanks to the OP Association for inviting me this evening, to those who have organised and prepared such a lovely meal and inviting such an impressive selection of OPs and guests. You are a lovely cross section of friends, colleagues past and present and past pupils. Thank you for taking the time to come. It is much appreciated.

Particular thanks go to Alex for the kind things which have been said about me, I know these are the sincere memories you have of me and I am greatly touched. It is interesting to hear how other perceive us to be and how different it is from how we perceive ourselves.

It is in the month of November we hear the immortal words associated with remembrance... 'Age shall not weary them'... make no mistake, it does. After 35 years in the classroom, 33 of them at PC it is time to hand the reigns to younger, more energetic, and infinitely more able. Teaching is and has been a great pleasure to me and brought untold satisfaction over the years. To hear recently from many OPs about their memories of me and their time and experience of life at the College is a humbling experience. How 'life in the lab' with Juniors can spark interest and enthusiasm leading, in time to careers in Science, Pharmacy, Medicine, and lecturing in some of the most prestigious institutions in the world, is humbling. It also makes you realise that 'the harvest' can take some time to come in, but when it does, it is rich and plentiful, and marvellous to behold.

I stand before you as a bit of a fraud as I am not actually leaving PC entirely, I am to return in September to work for just a few hours a week teaching RS to some year 7 classes. It is a long time since I taught RE but seeing as God is unchangeable, I don't feel I have fallen behind too much in my understanding of Him and should be able to manage to Evangelise and give New Year 7 pupils a taste of the Princethorpe dream, I am moving to a 'corner of the Vineyard', a more shaded spot, I think it will be wonderful.

Over the 33 years I have had the privilege to be involved in a number of jobs, classroom teaching occupying a large part of my time, but I was in charge of timetabling during times when the curriculum and timetable was planned with pencil and paper and lots of plastic pegs, thank God for a computer which now takes the hardship out of the job and does it much better than I ever did. I then moved on to be Examinations secretary and spent several years with my red case full of papers, steering pupils through the agony of public exams. When I moved to be Director of Boarders, the job of Examination secretary was taken over by a previous member of staff who shall remain nameless; suffice it to say that he did little for Cino/UK relations when he confused Mandarin with Cantonese O-level, suggesting that it was 'all bloody Chinese' any way and just get on with it!!! How quickly my good work was both done and undone...he had to go.

Moving on to Director of Boarders had its many triumphs and tragedies. The unrelenting work and responsibility, with Fr Alan for the Welfare of over 200 boarders was a daunting task. The daily routine of getting them up washed and fed, educated, and back to sleep again without losing them or causing major catastrophe was a daily uphill struggle. Of course we did lose a few, but if the weather was okay, they might sleep in a hedge and invariably come back the next day. If it were to

happen now, we would no doubt have a police helicopter to find them...how times have changed. We had quite a number of Forces children as boarders and the impact of the Falkland's war in 1982 was great on the boarding community. Many Forces parents were sent overseas leaving children desperately worried for their welfare. It was a tense time, especially the evening HMS Coventry was hit and sunk on 25th May 1982...what a dark time in our Nation history. Boarding had its lighter moments, the evenings spent sitting up till God alone knows when, after some (now OPs) discovered the demon drink. Daring not to let them sleep and choke, Fr Alan and I might see 2 or 3am then say quietly, I think he'll be okay now only to be covered in projectile vomit as you attempted to get out of their bedroom door. Poor Fr Alan got more covered than I and deserved it the least. Routine predominated, punctuated by tragedy. The rare death of a pupil is almost beyond human endurance and certainly beyond understanding. When Edward Enwonwu collapsed and died in the playground, it made you reappraise all life's priorities and left an atmosphere of confusion and bewilderment amongst us all. Emptying his room and packing his trunk, are unenviable tasks which haunt me to this day. Edward is one of a few deceased OPs; we are everywhere, even Heaven. The death too of Sister Alban and the untimely death of Father Seamus McManus and recently, Heather Harris left our school, our community and our world much worse. They were and remain, irreplaceable.

After boarding came 24 years as Head of Junior school, bringing me up to the present day and this happy function. Some ask how and why I have stuck at it for so long. I have always seen that the work had an apostolic dimension to it. I mean by this, that I think (hopefully not foolishly or naively) that this is what God wanted me to do. I have stuck at it until I hear His next calling. This has happened. It's no good singing the school hymn, with its line, 'Here I am Lord', unless we listen and answer His call. Over the years I have been helped by God's grace, sustained by the community spirit and nourished spiritually by the Eucharist. With these anything is possible regardless of the length of time or how humdrum tasks can sometime be.

Each of use here has been the lucky recipient of something special about the Princethorpe experience. It is as scripture tells us 'the pearl beyond price'. The experience was given, in abundance by the example and lifestyle (Charism) distinctive to the MSC community. So what is this charism and what is so special about it? I think it has something to do with **BEING** rather than **DOING**. From early times through to the present day, the emphasis has been mainly on **BEING**; we are after all, human beings and not human doings!!! This charism came from MSCs such as Father John Kevin Fleming, Fr Bill Clarkson, Fr Teddy O'Brien, Fr Seamus McManus, Fr Dan O'Connor, Fr Charles Sweeney, Fr Alan Whelan to name but a few, and the Sisters of St Paul, and Sister Ignatius Loyola along with other lay staff and our lay Heads who took up their challenge and continue to carry the torch through to present times. They had it right, they had worked out that it is just as important to **BE** as well as **ACHIEVE** or **DO**. That doesn't mean we don't have to achieve, of course we do, and work hard and do our best and use our God given talents fully and wisely. **Being** good, **being** tolerant, **being** understanding, **being** lovable and loving, **being** generous, **being** a good laugh, **being** hospitable, **being** a good listener, **being** Godly, **being** spiritual, **being** community minded, **being** sensitive, **being** welcoming, **being** faithful and loyal, **being** a source of fun and friendship **MATTER enormously** and make a difference to who we are and what we are about and what we become. It is creational.

I suppose, when it is all over and our life is done, God is unlikely to ask us, what class of degree did you get? He might ask, what did you **BECOME** with the life I gave you? How did you use my

creation? Were you a good human **BEING**? Were you pleased with my creation? The Princethorpe experience has created us in the way it has, it certainly pleases me, I hope it pleases you, and I am sure it pleases God.

I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to those who have had an impact and influence on my life, my private life and professional life. My own family, of course, and my Princethorpe family. You are a cross section of the PRINCETHORPE FAMILY and I thank you for all that you are and all you have been to me. It is time now for me to move on to other important tasks before precious time runs out.

Let us work hard together, ensuring that both present and future generations of Princethorpians can benefit from this unique and special experience, as we have. That will surely be a lasting legacy the 'pearl beyond price' and well worth doing. I hope you agree.