

FR. RUPERT HOPER-DIXON, O.P.

(Words written for his funeral)

“And devout men took order for Stephen’s funeral and made great mourning for him.” (Acts viii, 2.)

IN contrast with the little mourning that was made or is recorded for the death of St. James, the Apostle of Jesus and the brother of St. John, this great mourning made for St. Stephen seems almost an exaggeration of grief.

Perhaps the reason why the death of the young deacon begot great mourning and the death of a great apostle is recorded laconically in a line is the element of unexpectedness found in one and absent from the other.

There could be little unexpected in the martyrdom of a great apostle who had been chosen from the twelve who, themselves, had been chosen by the Crucified. Indeed it would have been the unexpected if this apostle and follower of the Crucified had not drunk the chalice of martyrdom which his Master had promised him to drink.

But nothing in Stephen’s short life had prepared his brethren for his death. The hail of stones that crushed his young life seemed a useless, unintelligible plucking of a blossom destined to fruit; but, in God’s unfathomable plan, appointed unto death.

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The great mourning we are here making is for one whose death, like the deacon Stephen’s, seems almost unintelligible in its unexpectedness. If the spring blossom is, at its best, a promise of autumn fruit, how could we expect to mourn, as we are to-day mourning, a promise broken almost on being made?

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God gave Father Rupert to the children of St. Dominic working in the heavy harvest-field of England. In giving him to us, God had endowed him with the gifts that fitted him for all the highest activities of our English apostolate.

He was undeniably, even exuberantly, human. But it was not that almost pathological humanity that, in its sensitiveness, makes a fillip seem a heavy blow. Rather, it

was the manly humanity of the apostle who comes forth from scourges rejoicing that he is worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus. In this morning's grief for the dead, there are few things that are so irresistibly towards tears as the memory of his faith-begotten mirth and laughter.

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God had also seemed to fit him for the English harvest-field by unusual gifts of mind. His masters in philosophy and theology recognized from the outset an aptness for principles which authenticates the philosopher and the theologian. But his pupils in philosophy and theology recognized in this authentic philosopher and theologian a clear, simple, inspiring teacher.

If, in every activity of his mind, he was a child of St. Thomas, it was because, like St. Thomas, in every activity of his soul he was a child of St. Dominic. This is but to say that, amidst a thousand enthusiasms of his soul, his religious life for God and with God was his fundamental enthusiasm. Yet he was no mere mediævalist wishing to go back to Dominic and the thirteenth century. By his religious profession he was a dedicated Christian seeking to go back with Dominic to Dominic's Master, Jesus of Nazareth, Whose coming is always the fulness of time and Whose teaching is for all time the fulness of truth.

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Amidst the gifts of mind and soul, fitting him, as we thought, for a rich harvest of souls, God had withheld the necessary gifts of body; or of that human prudence which can keep the lamp of life burning after it has ceased to warm and shine.

We who stand bewildered by his open grave must see in this almost unintelligible loss only the mystery of God's Will—perhaps even the mystery of this servant-of-God's will.

But his taking from us has so much the character of a sacrifice—and perhaps a chastisement!—that we ask God to show us if and how this chastisement may be forestalled by our memory and still more by our emulation of the dead.

R.I.P.

VINCENT McNABB, O.P.