

PROFILE

God's special friend

At the funeral of Fr. Maurus, Abbot Timothy began his homily by saying that the Fr. Maurus we knew and loved was God's special friend. He explained that he would witness to God no matter what the circum-

We continue with the new series on the 'pioneers of the Focolare'. **Fr Jonathan Cotton** pays tribute to his fellow Benedictine, Fr Maurus Green.

stances. He would ask the awkward questions, adopt the hopeless, and champion principle even if it were inconvenient. One might add that at one level, Maurus felt a personal failure,

but by God's grace this was redeemed in him. Fr. Abbot discerned the divine thread in Maurus' life.

A longing for divine mercy

Maurus Green was full of contradictions and goodness. Born on 27th December 1919 in Harrow on the Hill of an English Father and an Irish mother. He was an observant and pious monk and yet could be extremely human, funny, bordering on the irreverent. He was scrupulous yet audacious, he was very precise in discussions about certain issues, but could be vague and forgetful. He had a way with words, both in conversation and in his writings. He researched details of theology and biography, and meticulously worked on the books and articles he wrote, but he was not an intellectual. He could be both the most amusing companion and also infuriating. He could be kind, courteous and compassionate and then sometimes off-hand and, to his own shame, cutting. He was always quick to apologise and quick to start again after mistakes. With all this went an engaging smile, a wonderful sense of humour, a sense of his own unworthiness and a longing for divine mercy for himself and for others. This was the person that God called to become Christ-like as a monk and priest and as Maurus himself would say after surviving more than one near-death experience, 'I am not yet cooked well enough to enter heaven'. When one got to know him, he was a good, warm-hearted friend, and this was especially true as he reached the end of his life

in the infirmary at Ampleforth and a happy three year 'slow-cooking process' of sanctification there.

Try not to do too much harm

Maurus enjoyed his time as a pupil at Ampleforth. He was a great athlete who excelled at long-distance running. In 1942 he was accepted for solemn vows and went to St. Benet's in Oxford during the war where he read modern languages, gaining his degree. He came back to Ampleforth for theology, teaching, and was involved in scouting. He was soon put on parish work around the Abbey, and spent the rest of his life working in various 'Ampleforth' parishes. As the young 35 year old, zealous and earnest Maurus, left Ampleforth on his first mission experience, the departing words of Abbot Herbert Byrne to him were: 'Try, Father dear, not to do too much harm.'

In the parish, Fr Maurus was very unconventional. He had very broad interests, and a mind and heart that truly saw everyone as his brother and sister. He was interested in Christians of other denominations, in those of other faiths, and those who had no faith. He was interested and supportive of people of other countries, cultures and races. He was ready to take on causes, groups and needy individuals, and this meant that he would not fit neatly into a generally accepted pattern of life for an Ampleforth monastic priest. Personal contacts led to long-lasting friendships and made deep impressions on peoples' lives that changed them forever. Maurus remained loyal and loving, even when the 'parishioner/friend' was not congenial. He opened an ecumenical centre for the unemployed in Warrington, and also set up a Samaritans group. He would write to Cardinals, archbishops, politicians, the press and even the Queen.

Full of mercy

There is one strand in Maurus that helps us to understand his vision. This was his involvement in the Focolare Movement, from 1961 until his death on 12 September 2001. The ideal of the Focolare is to live for the unity that Jesus prayed for in his last testament (John 17: 21). Maurus was the first priest in Britain to be involved in



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Focolare. The Focolare spirit strengthened and supported Maurus. The founder of the Focolare, Chiara Lubich knew Maurus and recognised his importance in this spiritual family of people in Britain and Ireland. She sent a personal message on the occasion of his funeral. It read: *'I participate with emotion in the celebration of the last greeting for our dear friend Fr. Maurus Green... He was a true witness of our ideal from the beginning since its diffusion in Great Britain and Ireland, and for this reason we gave him the name "Apostle". How many of us have known the Movement personally from him! He was prodigal in bringing the light of the Charism to as many people as possible, being a model of a monk and priest according to the heart of God, full of mercy...'*

The author

Maurus' first book, *She Died, She Lives* is about a young girl, Maria Orsola, from a small parish near Turin whose cause for canonisation is under way. She was deeply involved in the Focolare, and Maurus was fascinated by her story and by meeting her companions and her family. His book allowed him both to tell the English-speaking world about Maria and to express his own convictions through her. *She Died She Lives*, was written under the pseudonym of George Francis. Maurus thought that were

his name attached to the book, then the brethren and others from the dioceses in which he served would be prejudiced against it!

Maurus' last book, *The Vanishing Root*, is about Eddie McCaffrey, a young boy with muscular dystrophy who lived with his parents in St. Austin's parish, Liverpool. Later Eddie and his mother moved to his stepfather's native Dublin. Maurus knew him well at St. Austin's and in Ireland. Eddie was in a wheelchair from a young age, and he could have ended a bitter young man. In the event, through the spirit of unity of the Focolare that he lived and loved, he became a source of new life for many people in Ireland. Maurus recognised the greatness of Eddie and wanted to make him known. He was a remarkable young man dying at the age of 30 with almost every muscle in his body broken and useless after his life of love for God and others.

One of the secrets of Maurus was his loving understanding of the cross. He writes about it in his own books, and he lived it in his life in many different ways. We used to see the great smile and the love in his heart, and behind it all was a sense of spiritual and human failure that was redeemed. For him failure was the way ahead. Maybe this is another good lesson for us all. He never reached high rank in the monastery, but as Fr. Abbot said at the funeral, he was God's special friend. 