

The Servant of God, the deacon Fr. John-Mark

What is the best way in which we can honour Fr. Deacon John-Mark here today in this funeral service?

Is it by memory?

Well, memory is important. We could barely function without memory. Not without good reason does the Orthodox Church acclaim the departed with the words:- “Memory Eternal!” We want this man, this beloved brother to live forever in our hearts and through the generations to come. To this end we have our own stories to tell and a selection of these has been gathered together in the booklet provided which you may read with profit at home later. In Church his memory is sustained by weekly commemoration in the Liturgy amongst the clergy reposed in the Lord. He will not be forgotten.

I suggest, however, that “memory” is good but not the *best* way to honour him for it doesn’t change anything in our lives right now except to help us grieve, which is important but our lives cannot be renewed by grief except to enable us to move forward *beyond* that grief.

What about a celebration of his achievements? They are, after all many. Moreover they can inspire us to follow his example in reaching for the very best in our lives. It’s a sobering thought though, particularly made clear by anyone’s death, that our achievements, however good, are but transitory and beckoned by dust and decay. Some things we achieve in this life DO endure beyond the grave, but much else, proper in its own place, does not. If there is anything clear about Fr. John-Mark, it is that the things that really mattered to him were those things that endure.

So, I think we know now how best to honour him. Seek those things that endure.

Now some people of course think that nothing endures beyond the grave save the memory and the record of human achievements. Theirs is an unhappy lot for what is left

but to follow in a finally fruitless endeavour. Our children may thank us and for a time they will enjoy the legacy of our lives but their lot is the same in the end. If this was the last word on the matter the writer of Ecclesiastes would have truly spoken,

1:2 *“Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher;*

“Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.”

However, it is not the last word for those who hope in the Risen Christ and, for this reason Fr. John-Mark did not believe such a miserable doctrine. We all, therefore, fall short of his vision if we flirt with it, or, God forbid, embrace it. It was Jesus Christ that made all the difference to His servant John. Christ was his ever present loving Companion, Confidante, Saviour and Lord. Everything he did, everyone he knew, all that he held dear was utterly transformed and beautified by this faith. This endures. St. Paul comments in his first letter to the Church in Corinth, that great hymn of praise to Love, who is God,

13:13 And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

These endure, these abide, faith, hope and love and Fr. John had these in abundance in a very practical and down to earth way. We truly honour him, therefore, when we embrace as he did, faith, hope and love as manifest to us in our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ.

He it is now who receives his friend and servant John. He it is who has delivered him finally from his suffering and sorrow. He it is who, being the Fullness of Life, is his resurrection and glory in the Last Day. And He it is above all who beckons us to tread in those warm steps that Father John has trod before us. Let us, then, be up and going. We have a glory to follow.