

Sr Bernadette Fox - Eulogy by her brother Bill Fox

'Lest we grieve like those who have no hope', as St Paul says; or look like the Catholics that Pope Francis described as 'looking like they are forever in the time of Lent' I'd like you all to stand and with joy greet those around you who, by Baptism, share our hope in an eternal life begun already.

This is not a sad occasion, we would not have wanted to keep Bernadette on this earth a day longer. Marg, Joan, Kerin and I, and Caroline sat around her bedside as she was peacefully dying. We had just sung 'The Lord is My Shepherd'; it was a very special moment of grace. She opened her eyes, looked at all of us and decided it was time she went home! The room was filled with an extraordinary feeling of peace and calm. We'd had weeks to prepare ourselves for this moment. As a friend of ours said, 'she would have had her bags packed and been ready, wouldn't she?' She certainly did and was!

A couple of days before she died, she whispered in a voice that was barely audible, 'Jesus and Mary, make room for me'.

We have all come together for this Mass today to acknowledge Bernadette's life, especially as a Good Shepherd sister, which is where most of you came into her life; we want to thank God for that life and to pray for her. She was carrying on a family tradition when she entered the Good Shepherds because she had three Aunts who were Good Shepherd sisters and only one Mercy aunt!

Many memories were shared last night by those who knew Bernadette in her life as a Good Shepherd sister; and lovely things were said about her. I intend to reveal to you the 'dark' side of her life that only Marg and I knew before she entered the Good Shepherds. In doing so you will see how much the Holy Spirit transformed her into the person you came to know in religious life.

The trauma of our mother's death greatly influenced the three of us. Marg, as you all know, somewhere in it all, decided she would get on top of her sadness and grief and we all know the drive and energy she has. Always one step ahead, and always ready with an answer to any question, which was no small annoyance to Bern, but is a great attribute for a teacher to have!

Bern and I were different – we dealt with the loss of Mum by being anxious and insecure. We saw life as a dangerous place! I'll explain with a couple of examples...

Did you know that Bern only flew in an aeroplane once before she entered because she was so frightened to fly, and that was to Tasmania? A half hour flight! And this was the Mother General who flew around the world a few times visiting so many countries. She would have gone into places and situations that would have scared the daylights out of her before she entered. So you can see what transformation the Holy Spirit brought about in her and the effect of the grace that went with the job? For when I say she was frightened to fly, I mean she was literally, terrified! White knuckles on the armrests!

If Dad, Marg, Bern and I were waiting on the station for a train I would tease her by going close to the edge of the platform and leaning over, till she frantically pleaded with Dad to make me come back. This anxiety didn't diminish as she grew older. I would have been about 11 or 12 and she would have been 16 or 17. She and Marg slept in a unit out in the back yard in East Brunswick and it was a poorly lit trip from the back door of the house to the door of the unit. When it was time to go to bed Bern would offer me sixpence if I'd go first to the sleepout and look under the bed to make sure a man wasn't hiding there. That's how frightened she was and her fear was palpable. The two of us would set out from the back door and she would be behind me. I could feel her fear and, believe me, fear like that is contagious. By the time I got to look under the bed I was as scared a she was, and well and truly earned my sixpence! I even upped the ante to a shilling in the end. It's no wonder she chose the cloistered life where the possibility of finding a man under the bed is greatly reduced! This was the nervous teenager who was transformed into a gentle, firm leader, whose vision grasped the needs of her Sisters, the Church, and the world in those exciting days after the Vatican Council. This is the religious who travelled the world and slept in many unnerving situations and in all kinds of places. Joan, I don't know if you had to look under the bed for her at any stage but if you did I hope you held out for more than a shilling!

Bern had a great love for our large family on the Browne side: aunts and uncles, cousins and their children and grandchildren, some of whom are with us today. She loved the periodic reunions when we gathered together in many states

around Australia. She took a great interest in what was happening in their lives, and photos of some of the older grandchildren sat on her bedside table. She even had one of the girls called after her: Bernadette.

I'm sure Anne will expand on her religious life better than I can, but, up to her last couple of months she looked forward to reading each 'Tablet' and 'Swag' as they arrived. She had a strong sense of the universal Church, its trends and changes. She would say more than once, 'the Church has to change radically'! What an extraordinary transformation!

When Kerin and I married, Bern and Marg suddenly had a sister-in-law, and inherited my four wonderful step children, Kylie, David, Michael and Paul and, in time, our six delightful grand-children. Every one of the children and their partners were welcomed by Bernadette and Marg. How they enjoyed nursing each of the grandchildren as they came along. It gave Bern much pleasure to see them grow and develop. She related to them with a warmth and ease that endeared her to them. The children loved to see Bern and Marg and they had many special times with them at our home in Barwon Heads.

Bern has been a great sister to Marg and me over the years and while we miss her we wouldn't want her back. She has gone gently to the God who kept loving her into life. Marg, you can look back on these last few months when Bern was failing and take great comfort in the company and care you gave to Bern. She couldn't have wished for a better sister.

I asked her recently, 'Bern, what made you think you were called to religious life'? 'It was the hound of heaven', she said, 'I fled him down the nights and down the days, I fled him down the labyrinthine ways of my own mind...'. And of course, the 'hound of heaven' turned out to be the Good Shepherd. She embraced the charism of the Order and we witnessed her care and hospitality for all of us and her compassion for those least cared about in our world.

So Marg and I, Kerin and Joan thank God for our sister, for a life that enabled her to share the compassion of the Good Shepherd wherever she was. Thanks, Bern, pray for us as we pray for you.
