

*Priest* is a beautifully shot film chronicling life in the Bradford parish of 'Mary, Mother of God' in non-pandemic times from the beginning of Lent to Easter Sunday. It is produced and directed by filmmaker Michael Whyte.

## **Love and Service**

As a priest, Fr Paul Grogan supports his people through their ups and downs – in their joy and in their pain.

The film opens with a funeral; features a baptism and shares the intimacy and beauty of a deathbed scene.

The work of 'The Priest' is one of love and service, not just in ministering to his parish, but providing invaluable, social support to the local community.

Fr Grogan, originally from Halifax, worked as a journalist after graduating from the University of Cambridge. He went onto train for the priesthood at the Venerable English College in Rome in the late 80s to mid-90s.

He has spent time as a university and hospital chaplain and worked in a Young Offenders Institution. He has also been the Vocations Director for the Diocese of Leeds and since 2015, has been the parish priest of Mary, Mother of God.

## **A calling from childhood**

In the film, Fr Paul says that he thought about becoming a priest at an early age:

"I remember my two brothers and I sitting on the sofa when we were young and Sister Magdalene, a Sister of Mercy, standing over us saying, 'and which one of you three is going to be the priest?' and I thought it's probably me, but I'm not going to out myself just yet."

The making of the film has made him aware of how lucky he is to be a priest.

"Michael's camera allowed me to gaze upon my own life and work from a perspective outside of myself. A young couple mourn the death of their severely disabled child – and I get to spend time with them in their grief.

"An elderly woman is dying – and it is to me that she says the simple lapidary words which are etched in my memory: 'I am not afraid of dying.'

"Two adults with learning difficulties look forward to receiving the First Sacraments and I get to share with them as best I can what it all means."

## **Honesty and Shortcomings**

It has also brought into sharp relief his failings and shortcomings:

"I was so defensive when a widow criticised me for not having visited her just-deceased husband sufficiently regularly that I wrote a letter to her, trying to justify myself. It was a cruel and cowardly thing to do and her niece properly upbraids me, at some length, in the film.

“As a young priest I was in denial on a couple of occasions that my relationships with women had become too close. When I mentioned that in the film I felt newly overcome by shame because of the confusion and the hurt I caused.”

The Bishop of Leeds, the Right Reverend Marcus Stock, Fr Grogan’s bishop, says that the film portrays the highs and lows of parish ministry:

“This film provides a ‘fly-on-the-wall’ view of the day to day life and ministry of a Catholic parish priest. It captures the breadth of ministry and demonstrates the privileged access that a priest is given to the lives of people during vital moments of great joy and profound grief.

“Frankly and honestly, it depicts some of the highs and lows in parish ministry but also allows the deep personal faith and commitment of the priest to shine through in all that he undertakes in the name of Christ and the Church.”

Documentary maker Michael Whyte says that he never takes for granted the privilege afforded by his work:

“Making documentaries is an immense privilege and to enter into the lives of other people with such intimacy should not be taken for granted and is often a humbling experience. For instance, when I was filming the Last Rites being given to Mary Cunningham, I had two thoughts: one, I should not be in this room, intruding on this very private and intimate time and second this is a powerful scene showing the value of the priesthood as Fr Paul commits Mary into the arms of God. I should add that the family had given permission and Mary herself had requested to be filmed.”

Michael came to this project as an outsider, not a Catholic and “hopes that it gives an insight as to why people chose to commit their lives in the service of the Catholic Church.”

He was inspired to make the film, despite the fact that the Catholic Church has been beset by scandal, because he was “more concerned with those members of the Church who have a profound belief and commitment to their faith and how they go about their daily lives in the shadow of this scandal.”

He is keen to point out that “working with Father Paul, I had a privileged view of the priesthood as it should be.”

PRIEST the feature length documentary follows the success of NO GREATER LOVE and RELICS AND ROSES, by acclaimed Director Michael Whyte and completes his trilogy of films exploring faith in the Catholic Church.

## **Watch**

You can [stream \*Priest\*](#) or [buy the DVD](#).