

FRANK GALBALLY: 1922 — 2005

Farewell to a man of faith and fierce intellect; of passion, Pies and Peanuts

By GREG BAUM

FRANK Galbally's funeral was big but not grand. The coffin was plain, the ceremony simple: some incense, some hymns, one wreath, but few other adornments. And yet there was grandeur. It was in the story of Galbally's life. It seemed barely to fit between the columns and beneath the spires of St Patrick's Cathedral.

The mourners included former premier John Cain, former Collingwood captain Des Tuddenham, Collingwood president Eddie McGuire, state Attorney-General Rob Hulls, a cohort of QCs and doubtless some of their clientele who did not necessarily want to announce themselves. They also included Galbally's wife Bernadette, his eight children, a squad of grandchildren and one of the two surviving of his eight siblings.

They remembered a man legendary for his work as a barrister for the defence in more than 300 murder trials. "As was once said of Father Brosnan, he worked with a terrible lot of people," said co-celebrant Father Peter Norden. "Frank Galbally clearly had an understanding of the sacredness of all human life, not just the defence and protection of innocent human life."

They remembered a man devoted to the unprivileged and unrepresented, a man his son and eulogist-in-chief Simon Galbally said was fittingly remembered as "the father of modern multiculturalism". Among his legacies is SBS.

They remembered a man with passions for learning, the arts, reading, music, opera, Chivas Regal and Polish vodka, but also Collingwood Football Club, a meat pie and sauce at lunch, the Marx brothers, *Monty Python*, *Fawlty Towers* and especially *Peanuts*. He would, said his son, smuggle *Peanuts* comics into court, disguised by plain white paper, and read them during prosecutors' addresses.

They remembered a busy man who, none the less, played tennis four times a week, who made time for migrants and who would do his children's homework while preparing the next day's address — without notes — but who would sometimes be

interrupted in these endeavours by a knock on the door from a man with a shotgun.

They remembered a man of strong faith who, even at the peak of his career, set aside one morning every week to teach catechism at the local state school in Ivanhoe. They remembered a man who — in the image of the saint whose name he bore — loved animals. They laughed to hear of perhaps the only time when words failed him. It was during an audience with Pope John Paul II in 1982, arranged to pass on funds raised in Melbourne for Solidarity, the Polish revolutionary movement. Fumbling for papers in a briefcase, he turned to Bernadette and said: "Could you hold these bloody things while I look for the others?"

The Pope, doubtless amused,



Devoted: Frank Galbally

sed, offered to help.

They remembered a man who neither boasted nor complained, even as arthritis and then Alzheimer's began to take its toll. They remembered a man who, said his son, did have regrets: "1964, 1966, 1970, 1977, 1977, 1979, 1980, 1981." These, it will easily be recognised, are the years of some of Collingwood's many losing grand finals.

They remembered a good-looking man who was always immaculately dressed, whose voice was "liquid gold", but whose whisper "could be heard through concrete" (and of which he was oblivious). But these, said Simon, were merely "the glossy cover of a rich book".

Galbally was born during the Depression, into a large family of Irish heritage, a background Father Norden said "gave him great empathy for those who

were less fortunate in life". He went to the now-closed Jesuit school next to the cathedral, and entered the Jesuit seminary in Werribee. He found that priesthood was not for him, but kept his much-annotated Missal to the end of his life; it was placed on the coffin yesterday.

He joined the navy, studied and sometimes improvised. As Simon said, he was a master of bluff. Set a paper once about which he knew nothing, he wrote it half in Latin and half in ancient Greek. He passed.

They remembered, of course, the lawyer. John Phillips, QC, told of how he skipped law lectures as a student to watch Galbally at work. "Frank never walked — he strode," he said. Sometimes, but not always, he made the sign of the cross at the courtroom door. "It is distinctly possible," said Phillips, "that whether or not he crossed himself depended on the identity of the trial judge."

They remembered a man who was liable to be called on by prime ministers, but whose heart was with the common man. Simon told of the night police rang to say that one of his brothers was "tipsy" and had been taken into custody in Portsea. "When he got home, he was scolded," he said. "Not for being tipsy, not at all — but for being in Portsea."

Simon said it might reasonably be asked how it was to grow up in his father's immense shadow. "The measure of him is that none of us saw him that way," he said. "At home, he was just Dad." Grandson Finnbar, 4, watched sadly as Galbally declined. "He will like the place he is going," he wrote. "He will be happy. He will talk again, and probably ride bikes."

Simon said his father fulfilled the Ignatian ideal, to be "a man for others". "He was simply a beautiful man," he said. Phillips said Galbally would have expected some Latin at his funeral, so quoted the Roman poet Catullus: "And so forever, brother, hail and farewell."

But only after a while. In the best Catholic tradition, there was a lot of talking to be done in the forecourt before the cortege left. Later, there was a wake at Collingwood's headquarters at the Lexus Centre.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Frank Galbally's sons share a fond memory over their father's casket; Eddie McGuire, former premier John Cain and his wife Nancy, and Des Tuddenham arrive for the service; Mr Galbally's widow, Bernadette, is helped into the cathedral; Colin Lovitt, QC, chats with Father Peter Norden. Pictures: Craig Abraham.

