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ST JUDE'S ANGLICAN CHURCH, RANDWICK

SATURDAY 23 NOVEMBER 1996

**IN MEMORIAM ANDREW FISHER**

The Hon Justice Michael Kirby AC CMG

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We are here in this beautiful church to give thanks for the life of Andrew Fisher. We do so in the presence of his partner, Dr John Byrne, who displayed to Andrew the special gentleness that is described in the Old Testament as lovingkindness. We do so in the presence of Andrew's mother and father, Susan and Terry Fisher, and of his sisters Angela, Melinda and Katrina, whom he dearly loved. We do so in the presence of his special friends, Rebecca and Paul, Gail and Susan, Stephen, Richard, Trevor, Michael, John and indeed all of us whose lives were touched by Andrew.

We honour Andrew's life and remember him, encouraged by the beautiful music which was so lovingly played and sung. This place, the music and our meditation remind us not only of Andrew but of our own mortality.

Andrew was born on 12 November 1963. He was the eldest of four children. He loved his parents, his three sisters and other members of his family. From his earliest days he

displayed creativity and flamboyance. He loved colour and fashion, light and style. He was brought up in a Christian home. His flair and his enthusiasm were not easily dampened, whatever life presented.

He attended the Narwee Boys' High School. After completing his education there he went to the East Sydney Technical College. He took a course in fashion design. For a time he had his own label which bore witness to his creativity.

It was at this time that I first met Andrew. But soon afterwards, in 1989, his life was changed. He met that cruel enemy, HIV, which has claimed so many friends of many of us who are here today. He fought valiantly and fiercely against this enemy. In his fight he displayed two natural human emotions which were ever-present. They were interwoven. Often I saw them together in Andrew in recent years. They were fear and valour.

In the battle against HIV, he was steadily more and more preoccupied. He left the fashion industry that he loved so much. For a time he became a waiter. It was reputed that he could occasionally give a hard time to demanding customers. Andrew was not a person that you could take for granted or treat in an off-hand manner. He was always fiercely independent - fiercely Andrew.

As his health weakened, John Byrne and he travelled repeatedly to Bali. He loved that place. He always came back renewed by a visit there. He soaked up the climate, and the sunshine. He enjoyed the colour, the music and the simple spirituality of Bali. It was a great tonic for him and a joy to his friends to see his spirit revive.

Andrew tolerated me. If he ever gave way to a human fault, it would have been just the smallest skerrick of ageism. I am sure that he regarded me as an old fogey. Doubtless he was right. He had his own distinct musical tastes upon which he was quite insistent. There was only so much of my Mahler that Andrew could stand. When his patience was at an end, we all soon knew.

Someone whose patience was unending was Andrew's partner and friend for 14 years, John Byrne. He would spend the day at work looking after many patients with their serious problems and stressful conditions, including HIV. Then he would return home to attend with lovingkindness to Andrew. It was always moving to me to see that kindness, generosity of spirit and unfailing patience and love. Although John Byrne would deny it, I have always thought that the way he responded to Andrew's predicament was that of a man brought up as a good Catholic boy in the love of the Lord. He demonstrated the universality of the faith of the Church and in which Andrew was raised. Neither Jew nor Gentile. Neither circumcised nor

uncircumcised. Neither man nor woman. Neither straight nor gay.

When I was at school, so many years ago, I was instructed in Scripture by the celebrant, Canon Stuart Barton-Babbage. At that time, I learned poetry but, alas, never the poems of Auden. Indeed, my instruction never went beyond Tennyson, a fact that Andrew undoubtedly detected and ascribed to my great antiquity.

But Auden speaks to our time with a clear voice. In his poem "Death's Echo" he repeats a chorus apt for Andrew:

*"The earth is an oyster with nothing inside it,  
Not to be born is the best for man;  
The end of toil is a bailiff's order,  
Throw down the mattock and dance while you  
can.*

...

*The greater the love, the more false to its object  
Not to be born is the best for man;  
After the kiss comes the impulse to throttle,  
Break the embraces, dance while you can.*

..

*The desires of the heart are as crooked as  
corkscrews,  
Not to be born is the best for man;  
The second-best is a formal order,  
The Dance's pattern; dance while you can.  
Dance, dance, for the figure is easy,  
The tune is catching and will not stop;  
Dance till the stars come down from the rafters;  
Dance, dance, dance till you drop."*

Andrew's earthly dance is finished. But he will go on dancing. In days, and months, and years to come, Andrew will dance back into our minds to warm our recollections of a striking personality who loved light and colour, fashion and style, and who was always proudly himself. When he dances back to our recollection we will smile. We will remember him. We will not forget him.