



From A Bishop's Journal (697)

A Tribute to Fr. Ronald Bellefleur (1930-2007)

The diocese of Edmundston has lost three priests in the last nine months, priests who, after being very active for years in pastoral ministry, were beset by serious illness for many years further: Father Yvon Ouellet, Father Armand Plourde, and Father Ronald Bellefleur. “Unless the grain of wheat die, it cannot bear fruit; but if it dies it bears much fruit.” In expressing my sincere condolences to the family, I want to draw the attention of the people of the diocese to the vast “empty spaces” left by our confreres, and especially the emptiness today which the death of Father Bellefleur has caused.

Curates and Pastors

In one generation, we find that all these priests we used to call curates and even pastors, have no replacements. Father Ronald, who was curate at Drummond, Saint-Quentin and Saint-Jacques has no successors today. These curates who were so important for the welfare of the population, no longer exist. And even the ministry of pastor which Father Ronald exercised at Saint-Léonard-Parent no longer corresponds to the wonderful functions of those pastors of yesteryear. At the head of our fourteen pastoral animation teams are priest-moderators who, together with religious sisters and lay people, take on a given parish's pastoral charge, and even minister to up to four parishes. Today we have only thirty priests covering the entire diocese. The decrease in the number of priests, and their aging should not discourage us but incite us to pray the Lord for priestly vocations and for generosity in responding to His call and the call of the Church.

With the Youth

Father Ronald was happy to work with the youth. Taking into account the actual number of clergy and the new situation in [Francophone] schools, we no longer have any school chaplains. We may look back with nostalgia to the time when there were priests enough to be with youth groups: their beneficial presence was always welcome. Many of our schoolteachers give an exceptional Christian witness to youth, and I want to congratulate and thank them for this. It is the same with parents who pursue their children's religious education, not only teaching them the rudiments of the Christian faith, but giving them a desire to meet the Lord Jesus. Youth ministry teams try to respond to the spiritual expectations of our young people, and to revitalise our Church. May the example of Father Ronald be a strong incentive to work with our future leaders.

With Couples

Father Bellefleur was diocesan Marriage Encounter coordinator for the French section. Quite a few couples in our parishes were influenced either directly or indirectly by this remarkable Movement which contributed so much to revitalising the love of couples who seek only one thing: to love one another, and to love one another more deeply today than the day before. There are so many couples today who still need a priest to welcome them, listen to them and journey with them to greater love in their daily lives! In the presence of Father Ronald I ask the Lord that couples find on their journey, both before and during their married life, friends to help them and remind them that love and fidelity are still possible today; friends who help them to always seek what is essential, in life; and friends who help them build communion with each other, with their families and with the Church. The mission that Father Bellefleur had taken on and which other baptised people can continue today is to help couples grow in faith, hope, and love.

With the Sick

If there is a ministry that is both demanding and wonderful, it is ministry to the sick. Father Bellefleur exercised this ministry for over twenty years. May he be congratulated and thanked! “I was sick, and you visited me.” Father Ronald was unstinting in his service to young sick people as well as to the elderly. We don’t know the “why” of suffering, but we know that Jesus fully accepted it, even to death on the cross. Jesus was addressing the sick when he said: “Come to me, you who labour and are heavy-burdened, and I will give you rest.” By his friendly welcome of others, and his warmth, by his words and the celebration of the sacraments, Father Ronald gave life to the Word and the actions of the Lord, in his dealings with the sick. We owe a lot of gratitude to hospital and seniors’ homes’ personnel, and what regard and gratitude we owe to our hospital chaplains and our volunteers, and to all hospital personnel!

To the Church

I have often pointed out the apostolic fruitfulness of suffering. Through the years I have known Father Bellefleur, I have always seen him as a courageous man, smiling and teasing. He was not demanding of others, he could do with very little. His entire life was a model of simplicity, with exemplary courage and patience. His memory was extraordinary. When he said ‘yes’ he meant ‘yes’; when he said ‘no,’ it was ‘no.’ There was no ambiguity about him. I am certain that Father Ronald was a humble and deserving worker in our Church. He had offered to God the terrible trial of his being paralysed. “We must go through many trials to enter into God’s Kingdom.”

A Good Shepherd

Father Ronald, I want to apply to you St. John Eudes’ description of a good shepherd: A shepherd according to the heart of God “ is a living image of Christ in this world, the Christ who watched, prayed, preached, catechised, worked, went from town to town and village to village, suffering, agonising, dying and sacrificing himself for the salvation of all the souls created in his image and likeness.” Father Ronald, pray the Master to continue sending us pastors according to His heart.

+ François Thibodeau

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05-16-07