



From A Bishop's Journal (748)

A Tribute to Our Jubilarians

The last day of the priests' annual retreat is always dedicated to giving thanks to God for the gift of the priesthood, and to pay tribute to those who have an ordination anniversary during the course of the year. On Friday, May 2, we celebrated the 70 years of ordination of Monsignor Urbain Lang, P.H., the 60 years of ordination of Bishop Emeritus Gerard Dionne, and the golden jubilee of Fathers Normand Godbout, Jean-Guy Lang, Patrice Picard, P.M.É., and Rino Thériault. What follows is an excerpt of the homily I preached, on the occasion.

Let Us Rejoice!

More than ever, let us rejoice! Let us rejoice because the retreat which has been animated by Father Wesley Wade, V.G., of Bathurst, was remarkable from all viewpoints: he too is celebrating an anniversary, his forty years of priesthood! The Lord has once again showed his love, a love that is from age to age. The simple fact that I am in the company of so many deserving and outstanding jubilarians already indicates God's infinite love: each jubilarian and every priest is surely a sacrament of God's love, a visible sign of His love. It is well to recall God's many kindnesses to us and to our Church: the life He gives us, the Church and family bonds that give us life, the wonders of our faith, the many graces of conversion and those of support and encouragement, the marvel of God's Word and of the sacraments. "Oh Lord, you will that your people throughout the world share in the priesthood of your Son, and you give to some of them the charge of sanctifying, leading, and teaching in the name of the Lord. Give to these your servants whom you have made priests, the grace of fidelity to their mission. By their ministry and their lives, may they help their brothers and sisters and serve your glory."

Messengers of Joy

Among our jubilarians there are some who have had two dioceses, three or four parishes, many communities and numerous flocks, a people that was and remains the joy of these shepherds. The certainty of God's presence goes hand in hand with the certainty of vocation: Jesus chose apostles to be with him, at first, before ever sending them off on mission. And this was Jesus' great prayer, at the Last Supper: "Father, all those you gave me I would have in my company where I am." The certainty of his presence: "I am with you always, even to the end of time." Whatever the appointment, one's deepest joy is the realisation that one is in the presence of God. "Do not be afraid, for I am with you." This certainty can change many things, many ways of looking at our mission. Jesus is with me, Jesus

is with us. He wants us to remain with him forever. Then there is the presence of Jesus that is a cause of joy, and it isn't any kind of presence: "You will be sad, but your sadness will change to joy." Jesus came to bring joy to the world, and his greatest gift is that his messengers, his priests, his shepherds be "messengers of joy." Jesus knew long before the specialists of today that the medium is also the message!

The Joy of Childbirth

There is another element that can be a source of joy: we who are called to "give birth" to new Christians must also form new disciples of Christ. "When a woman is in labour she is sad that her time has come. When she has borne her child, she no longer remembers her pain for the joy that a human being has been born into the world." Through the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the sacraments we give birth to divine life to people of every condition, of all ages, in all milieus. It comes as no surprise that there is suffering, anguish and distress while the new baby is being borne. In the course of the last 50 to 70 years, evangelisation has had its ups and downs, there have been many kinds of methods employed, but this does not mean that the problems of giving birth were made any easier. We can read Father Benoît Lacroix's *La foi de ma mère* ("The Faith of My Mother") or *La religion de mon père* ("The Religion of My Father") to recall the many changes that have occurred in the lives of priests, people who were venerated as sacred, but who in today's world do not receive such consideration. If giving birth to the life of faith is often fraught with crosses and difficulties, it then becomes a source of joy. I remember that this was the gospel I proclaimed at my first Mass, and that it was Mother's Day. I knew that Mother, whom I had lost when I was 12, was looking down on me from heaven and that she would watch over my ministry well beyond May 9, 1965.

Messengers of Hope

Finally I want to add another element of joy, the great journey that would lead Paul from Greece to Syria, then to Ephesus, Jerusalem, Ceasaria, and finally Rome. As we prepare to enter into the Year of Saint Paul (June 29 2008-June 29 2009), we can join our own journeys to all those that Saint Paul undertook in his lifetime. If you happen to read Bishop Dionne's *Petite histoire*, you will note that he has probably surpassed St. Paul in the number of journeys, and I would not be surprised that our other jubilarians have, too. All these journeys, all these trips lead to Christ, and I believe that the liturgical hymn for the feast of Saints Peter and Paul is easily applicable to our jubilarians: "They are gathered together in the Father's house, the companions in trial who witnessed your crucifixion. You showed the way and they followed you, O Lord of the living. They carried in their hearts, to light the world, the mysterious image of your humiliated glory. Messengers of hope, they sowed your word, and you are their harvest. They are seated at the banquet of the Kingdom, for they have drunk from the cup of mutual love. You show them the Father and your joy is with them, Oh Jesus, Son of God!"

Joy of the Eucharistic Ministry

"The Eucharist is the simplest and most divine gesture that can be imagined," Henri Nouwen wrote in his spiritual testament. In the Eucharist Jesus reveals himself, so human and so divine, so familiar and so mysterious, so close and so revealing. In the Eucharist Jesus gives all that he has. The word that best describes the total gift of God who gives himself to us through love is the word 'communion.' It says that in Jesus and through Jesus, God wants not only to teach us, instruct us or

inspire us, but become one with us. The Eucharist ends with a sending forth to the mission. Go witness to what you have seen and heard, do not keep it for yourselves alone.”

+ François Thibodeau *in*

+ François Thibodeau, C.J.M.
Bishop of Edmundston

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