
A TRIBUTE TO FATHER LEWIS LONG



I want to thank God with you for His gift to us of Father Lewis Long; I want to thank him for all the work he did, here, in his 63 years of life and 37 years of ministry.

When I met Father Lewis Long in January, 1994, he was already having serious breathing problems, such that it was difficult for him to carry on parish ministry, even on an occasional basis. However much he so desired, whenever the day or hour arrived he had to cancel his commitment, which caused him a twofold pain: his heart wanted to undertake more than his physical capacities allowed.

TO THE END OF THE ROAD

The last six years were very difficult ones for him. He felt himself useless, a burden to others, his pain knew no let-up. Here I must express my deepest gratitude to all those who helped him, who visited him, who prayed with him. He was able to have a few good days, to take a short trip, to commune with nature, but these were rather rare moments. Last November, when all believed that his end was near, he felt in himself a new zest for life. It was then that I was able to sing with him "O Lord, my friend, you have taken me by the hand; I shall go with you fearlessly to the end of the journey. I walk with you ill the cold and the wind, I walk - who cares - and carry you with me in my heart. I shall walk on steadily signing my songs, I know that you wait at your beautiful home. And so, there you are, I see you face to face, I see your face and the table where you have set two places."

A COMMUNICATOR

His was a beautiful-sounding voice, and he was a wonderful talker; he loved to sing and to share. For years he hosted his own radio programmes, *As-tu deux minutes?* and *La vie au quotidien*. These presented short Gospel messages reminding us of the beauty of the present moment, and of the beauty of our God. Father Lewis's wish was that the Gospel be proclaimed from all the rooftops, in the manner of Jesus.

A DEMANDING MINISTRY

Through the long period of suffering that was his, Father Lewis experienced countless hours of anguish and anxiety. Pope John Paul II states that since the priest shares in the priesthood of Jesus, he must become more aware each day that this service is sealed by the cross. *"The cross reminds us priests of God's great love for humankind as of the great love He bears us personally. Just as the meaning of Christ's priesthood is rooted in the mystery of the cross, so is the priest's life grounded in the same mystery, the mystery of the cross."* [Pope John Paul II, *Address to Priests*, Montreal, 14 September 1984. T. L.G.] It was in this spirit that on February 11, the International Day of the Sick, I reminded the residents of the Foyer Saint-Joseph - aware that Father Lewis was listening to the celebration from his room - *"A priest who offers up his suffering can accomplish much for the building up of the Body of Christ. This ministry of suffering is demanding, it takes up all of your time, but thanks to Jesus who bore the sufferings of the world, this ministry shares in the redemption of humankind."*

THE ENIGMA OF SUFFERING

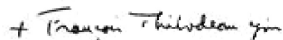
One of the most revealing texts on human nature is surely that of Vatican Council II, which says: *It is when faced with death that the enigma of the human condition is most evident. People are tormented not only by pain and by the gradual diminution of their bodily powers but also, and even more, by the dread of forever ceasing to be. But a deep instinct leads them rightly to shrink from and to reject the utter ruin and total loss of their personality. Because they bear in themselves the seed of eternity, which cannot be reduced to mere matter, they rebel against death. All the helps made available by technology, however useful they may be, cannot set their anguished minds at rest. They may prolong their lifespan; but this does not satisfy their heartfelt longing, one that can never be stifled, for an after-life.*

TOWARDS BEATITUDE

While imagination is at a loss before the mystery of death, the church, taught by divine revelation, declares that God created people in view of a blessed destiny that lies beyond the boundaries of earthly misery. Moreover, the Christian faith teaches that bodily death, from which people would have been immune had humanity not sinned, will be overcome when that wholeness which they lost through their own fault will be given once again to them by the almighty and merciful Saviour. For God has called men and women, and still calls them, to attach themselves with all their being to him in sharing for ever a life that is divine and free from all decay. Christ won the victory when he rose to life, for by his death he freed women and men from death. Faith, therefore, with its solidly based teaching, provided thoughtful people with an answer to their anxious queries about their future lot. At the same time it makes them capable of being united in Christ with their loved ones who have already died, and gives hope that they have found true life with God.

TOWARDS A CERTAIN SERENITY

If Father Lewis knew pain even to anguish, he had found some serenity some weeks before. He knew that nothing could separate him from the love of God, not fear nor suffering nor death. He had been ready for a long time for his final meeting with the Lord. After experiencing in his soul and flesh the overwhelming paschal mystery, he was able to get a glimpse of Easter Sunday. In thinking of him and asking the Lord to send good Gospel workers, we can repeat this hymn from the breviary which Father Lewis surely reflected on: *If hope has led you further than fear ever could, your eyes shall look up and you will be able to hold on until the rising of the Sun of God. If suffering has made you cry tears of blood, those eyes shall be washed and you will be able to pray with your crucified brother.* [Hymn, Morning Prayer, Common of Martyrs, in *La Liturgie des heures*, Tr. L.G.]



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