



From A Bishop's Journal (657)

A Tribute to Father Yvon Ouellet (1935-2006)

On Tuesday, August 1, I celebrated in Notre-Dame-des-Sept-Douleurs Church in Edmundston, the funeral of the late Father Yvon Ouellet who passed away July 29, at the Edmundston Regional Hospital. I would like to share with you here excerpts from the homily I gave, at the funeral.

Hymn to Hope

The Office of the Dead [French] has a remarkable hope-filled hymn. The words are: "O God, you reveal your light to those who go through the night: blessed are you for the eyes that are opening today to gaze upon a new earth. Glory to you, Lord, light of the Kingdom. You reveal your face to them after the exodus and the night: blessed are you for the eyes where in a reflection of the Easter dawn, they contemplate your face, O living God. You show them your presence and the joy of the saved: blessed are you for the dead who find peace in the happiness of your wedding feast. They are your glory, O living God. You draw them into your mystery with the strength of the Spirit: blessed are you for the bodies where life flows into the eternal dawn. They will rise again, O living God." Such a beautiful hymn, one that immerses us in the great mystery that Father Yvon is now living. After all the trials that have marked his pilgrimage on earth, he is now forever in the presence of the living God. Father Yvon is now living the great paschal mystery, the great passage from earthly life to heavenly life. Throughout his priestly life, Father Yvon proclaimed this great mystery. He loved the liturgy passionately, and day after day he proclaimed the great mystery of the Eucharist, the death and resurrection of Jesus, and his return in glory.

Sign and Gift of a Vocation

At a priest's funeral, it is altogether appropriate to go back to what Vatican Council II said about the ministry and life of priests: "By the sacrament of order priests are made in the image of Christ the priest as servants of the Head, so that as co-workers with the episcopal order they may build up the body of Christ, the Church. Like all Christians they have already received in the consecration of Baptism the sign and gift of their great calling and grace. So they are enabled and obliged even in

the midst of human weakness to seek perfection, according to the Lord's word: "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt. 5:48).

Called to Holiness

Vatican Council II insists over and over again that all priests strive to achieve holiness. "Priests are especially bound to attain perfection. They are consecrated to God in a new way by their ordination and are made the living instruments of Christ the eternal priest, and so are enabled to accomplish throughout all time that wonderful work of his which with supernatural efficacy restored the whole human race." And the Council goes on: "The very holiness of priests is of the greatest benefit for the fruitful fulfilment of their ministry. While it is possible for God's grace to carry out the work of salvation through unworthy ministers, yet God ordinarily prefers to show his wonders through those who are more responsive to the impulse and guidance of the Holy Spirit and who because of their intimate union with Christ and their holiness of life, are able to say with St. Paul: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20).

Revealer of the Face of Christ

Father Yvon was configured to Christ, in baptism and priestly ordination. Throughout his priestly life, he strove to reflect the kindness and holiness of Jesus the Good Shepherd. Through sacramental celebrations, countless pastoral activities, the witness of his life, his daily prayer, and his sufferings, he revealed to us the face of Christ dead and risen. Father Yvon had concern for the poor, for all the sick, and for those affected by the trials of life. He was close to his brother priests, sharing and praying with them, and through periodic meetings of the presbyterium. When I arrived in Edmundston he was a member of the College of Consultors. He went through difficult times in 1999 when health problems forced him to resign the pastoral ministry he loved so much. He did not like talking about his illnesses, or of his declining health. A man of prayer, his breviary was always at his side. Always available, he accepted several pastoral charges which forced him to adapt to those to whom he ministered. Very often he did not feel up to the challenge of the responsibility, and this awareness made him suffer. But then, how many priests can feel 100% up to the challenge? The Lord called to his service human beings with their weaknesses and limitations. Being a priest is a superhuman task. It is not for nothing that the Lord tells us: "Without me you can do nothing." We know, however, that the power of God is made manifest in human weakness. And Saint Paul even dares to say: "When I am powerless, it is then that I am strong. And so I willingly boast of my weaknesses instead, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (2 Cor. 12:9-10).

Communion to the Sufferings of Christ

Father Yvon had not planned on early retirement. The seven years he had after leaving Kedgwick are perhaps those that drew him even closer to the Lord as he shared in Christ's sufferings, enriching our Church's entire evangelisation task. Father Yvon generously offered up to God those difficult years. He would have loved to celebrate his 40 years of priesthood in a parish, but to friends who resided with him at the Maison du Père residence, he confided: "You are the ones who are now my

parishioners.” His newfound solidarity with the elderly brought him much happiness. Each year I celebrated the feast of the Nativity with him and his friends. May our Eucharist today help us better understand the great mystery of the life and ministry of priests. May the Lord continue to give us many holy priests.

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