



From A Bishop's Journal (676)

We Want to Walk with Jesus

Since the Christmas season is the season for card-sending and gift-giving, I want to wish to each and everyone of you my best wishes for peace, happiness and health. I hope that Christmas 2006 make us discover or rediscover the true face of Jesus, and that we in turn show him more and more in our daily lives.

More than a Living Manger Scene

The first Christmas I celebrated at the Edmundston Regional Hospital there were approximately ten young people representing the Holy Family, the shepherds, and the wise men. Upon meeting me all wearing my priestly vestments, with mitre and pastoral staff, a young boy asked me whether I, too, was a character in the living manger scene... I think that these mangers can help one grasp better the great mystery of the Nativity, but they cannot express everything. The manger scene can serve to introduce one to the divine mystery, remind one of what happened in Bethlehem over 2000 years ago, but we must not forget the three main dimensions of Christmas: Christmas yesterday, Christmas today, and Christmas tomorrow. Jesus has come, Jesus comes, Jesus shall come.

A Gift to You

I would like to offer you as a gift a song I composed to express how Jesus is our path, our way; I wish you to become better and better disciples of Jesus. As we walk in the footsteps of Jesus, may we deeply live the great mystery of the Incarnation.

We want to liberate humankind,
and lead it to the Father.
We want to walk with Jesus.

Perhaps along the road to Bethlehem, the glory of God,
the promised peace.
Perhaps the road to Nazareth, work of the hands, joy of the poor.
This call is the path to Jesus.

Perhaps the road to Jacob's Well, the Messiah to the people,
the living spring.
Perhaps the road to Mount Tabor, the radiant Son, the tent set up.
This call is the path to Jesus.

Perhaps the road to the Upper Room, washing of the feet,
and love demanded.

Perhaps the road to Golgotha, the raised cross, the blood shed.
This call is the path to Jesus.

Perhaps the road to Emmaus, hope regained,
and the friend recognized.

Perhaps the road to Galilee, death overturned, Christ raised up.
This call is the path to Jesus.

“I Followed Jesus”

In 1998 I attended in Rome the pastoral congress on human rights and I was privileged to meet Cardinal François-Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan who had just been appointed president of the pontifical Commission on Justice and Peace. The day he was appointed archbishop of Saigon in 1975, he was immediately arrested by the communists, and spent thirteen years in a Vietnamese prison. In order not to develop hatred for his enemies he started jotting down notes in handmade notebooks passed off as “Italian Language Exercises”: the book he gave me is titled *J’ai suivi Jésus* [“I Followed Jesus”]. At the end of the book is a prayer that resembles the sentiments of the song I offer you: “Lord Jesus, on the way to hope, for two thousand years your love has flooded, like a wave, so many pilgrims. They loved you with a burning heart, in thought, in word, and in deed. They loved you with a heart stronger than temptation, stronger than suffering, stronger than death. They were your Word in the world, and their lives were a revolution that changed the face of the Church.”

Prayer of an Ex-Prisoner of War

From his prison Archbishop Van Thuan penned the following prayer:

“I follow your every footstep, along the path of hope, your wandering steps towards the cave in Bethlehem. Your worried steps on the road to Egypt. Your rapid steps towards the house at Nazareth. Your happy steps as you go to the Temple with your parents. Your tired steps throughout your thirty years of labour. Your steps filled with concern, during your three years of preaching the Good News. Your eager steps as you searched out the lost sheep. Your sorrowful steps as you entered Jerusalem. Your heavy steps, as you are crushed under the burden of the cross, on the road to Calvary. Your vanished steps, in your death and in a tomb that was not yours. Stripped of everything, naked and without a friend. Abandoned even by your Father, but always submitted to the Father. Lord Jesus, on my knees, alone before the tabernacle, I understand: I could not pick another path, another more pleasant path, even if, there is supposedly a more appealing one... With a triumphal step, you told me, “Be courageous, I have vanquished the world! Take giant steps.” If you order me to go to the cross, I shall let myself be crucified. If you order me to enter the silence of your tabernacle until the end of time, I shall go fearlessly. I shall lose everything, but you shall remain. Your love will be there to flood my heart with love for us. My happiness shall be complete. That is why I chose you, I want only you and your glory.”

Discovering the Presence of Jesus

May Christmas 2006 make us discover in the midst of our lives, our trials, our joy and our pain the most loving presence of Jesus Emmanuel. May we follow the path of Jesus and become his disciples. Merry Christmas to one and all!

+ François Thibodeau

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