



LES PRÊTRES DE SAINT-SULPICE DE MONTRÉAL

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CANADA

HOMILY

Funerals of M. Gérard Gaudrault p.s.s.
(Rm 8, 18. 22-25.31-39; Ps 114-115; Jn 12, 24-28)
Saturday, August 13, 2011

Dear parents and friends,
Dear brother priests,

The Eucharistic Celebration that unites us today is the greatest form of prayer meeting possible. It allows us to give thanks to God for the life and priestly ministry of our friend and confrere, Gérard Gaudrault. We thank God for the good that He has accomplished through Gerry, and for the fullness of eternal life that Gerry has now received from him. In the past, Gerry enjoyed travelling to the United States to celebrate Thanksgiving with his family. Today, his family has travelled here in order to join his Sulpician family and his friends to celebrate a Sacramental Thanksgiving, his Funeral Mass.

Gerry entered into eternal life on the eve of the Feast of the Transfiguration of Jesus, Friday, August 5th, 2011 at Seven-thirty in the evening. The mystery that is the Transfiguration of the Lord allows us to contemplate Jesus speaking with Moses and Elijah. He speaks of the Passion and death that he will undergo in Jerusalem before the full manifestation of His Glory in the Resurrection. Through this experience, Peter, James and John, his friends and disciples, are prepared to witness the death of their Master and still keep their faith in the eternal life that Jesus will receive from the Father. The Transfiguration is a message about the future of the Church, the Body of Christ, and each of its members. We too know that the Lord will come in all His Glory in order to lead us into His Kingdom and take part in His Glory. This is ultimately the plan that God has for humanity, human history, and each human being.

The Liturgy of the Word that we have just celebrated is rich in teachings that nourish our faith and our hope for eternal life. The Word of God itself is also a path that leads us toward the fullness of Truth. It gives meaning to our whole existence as human beings, and as Christians. The First Reading, taken from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans, and the Gospel, taken from Saint John, both make us

reflect upon the mystery of life. Indeed, following the example of the founder of the Society of Saint-Sulpice, Jean-Jacques Olier, Father Gaudrault found two close friends in Saint Paul and Saint John. They were two friends who inspired his life, ministry, and spirituality. This is the reason for the choice of biblical texts for the Funeral Rites of our brother.

Human life is a precious gift given by God so that it might be full. In Jesus Christ, we become new beings. In Him, life is recreated. In Holy Baptism, each of us draws life from Christ. He is the source of life. He has redeemed us so that we might have life in Him, and have it abundantly. This is why we belong to Him: as Saint Paul says, “For this is why Christ died and came to life, that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living” (Romans 14:9). In Saint John, this fullness of life is expressed through the image of a grain of wheat that falls to the ground: “unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit” (John 12:24).

Gerry made his life a full one lived for God. It was a life that made a difference for a great number of people whom he encountered and served by way of his ministry as a priest and Sulpician, his dynamic and enthusiastic personality, and the power of his words. This fullness of life was most evident in his ministry to young people at College Olier and College de Montreal, as well as in summer camps and youth groups. This fullness also shone through in the parishes where he generously collaborated; whether at Sainte Colette, Sainte Catherine Laboure, or the Chapelle Notre Dame de Lourdes, he dutifully offered Mass and confession, and most notably, preaching, for which he had a true charism. Finally, this fullness was manifested to priests, seminarians, and laypeople seeking theological formation at the Major Seminaries of St. Boniface, Edmonton, and Montreal. It is in these places that his intellectual talents became most evident. He continued all these forms of ministry up until a few months before his death. An example of his dedication, which continued up until the end, comes to mind: two months ago, in June, Gerry accepted to prepare and preside over the penitential celebration during the Sulpician’s retreat at the seminary. He insisted on participating in this retreat despite his failing health.

His sense of service and capacity for the gift of self is made evident by this story. Life is a gift given to us so that we in turn may offer it as a gift. The Christian Life, or the life of a Christian — and even more so the life of a priest — is not lived for itself or even died for itself. As the Apostle to the Gentiles teaches us, “None of us lives for himself, and no one dies for himself” (Romans 14:7).

Christ Himself, in taking on our human condition, gave new meaning to life. He revealed through his actions and his words to the multitudes that followed him the

great mystery that is life. As the Suffering Servant of God, Jesus gave His life as ransom for the multitude. He taught us that “Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life.”

It is true that the thought of our own death, or the death of one whom we love, causes sadness, and sometimes fear. But, as Jesus did, we may cry up to God “Father, save me from this hour!” We also realize with Jesus: “But yet it was for this purpose that I came to this hour,” and with Him place all in the hands of God: “Father, glorify your name.” Finally, the voice of God reassures us, calling to mind the project has for us which has already been fully realized in the Person of Jesus: “I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.” (Jn. 12:27-28). This is the key to understanding the Easter mystery of Jesus, and our own Easter mystery: we become one with Him, as He is one with the Father (Jn 17:21).

Through his death and Resurrection, Jesus Himself reveals to us that all human existence belongs to the Father, author of life. It is also revealed to us that life is given us in abundance through the Son, the Eternal Living One, through the life-giving action of the one Spirit that the Father and Son share. We know that in every human life, as it was with Christ’s life, that “unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit” (Jn 12:24).

Our Brother Gerard experienced this sort of progressive death in his seven-year battle with cancer. Throughout this struggle he remained serene, lucid, and patient, keeping faith and hope through the highs and lows that his treatments caused. He never complained. A warm, welcoming extrovert, self-pity was never an option for Gerry. He remained a great supporter of community life: until the day he died, he insisted on being present in the refectory for meals with his brother priests, even if he could no longer eat. He even turned his illness into a means of doing good: he accepted to receive numerous experimental treatments, and to make detailed reports of the different side effects that each treatment produced. He understood that “the sufferings of this present time are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed for us... For neither death nor life nor any creature may separate us from the Love of God manifested in Jesus Christ, Our Lord.” (Rm 8:18, 38-39).

In the Gospel of St. John, all that we have said and all that he has to teach us is done “So that in believing we may have life in His Name.” (Jn 20:31 ; cf. Jn 3:16 and 10:10).

Our gathering here today is a profession of Faith and Hope in life : we believe that Jesus is Lord of the Living and the Dead (Rm. 14:9). We believe that if we live, we live for Christ, and that if we die, we die for Christ (Rm. 14:8). We believe that in

life as in death, we belong to Christ (Rm 14:9). We believe that where Jesus is, there too we will find our brother Gerard. We believe that we too are expected to join them, provided we become grains of wheat, thrown into ground, called to bear fruit in abundance (Jn 12:24). Above all, we believe that nothing can separate us from the Love of God shown in Jesus Christ, our Lord (Rm. 8:39). Thus the words of Jesus are fulfilled: “Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there also will my servant be. The Father will honour whoever serves me” (Jn 12:26).

This Eucharist, which we offer up for the eternal rest of our brother Gerard, brings us into the Easter mystery of Christ, of his body given up for us and his blood poured out for us and for many. In the Eucharist, we receive He who is the Bread of Life, so that through Him and in Him we may have life in its fullness, according to His word: “Truly, truly, I tell you... Who eats my body and drinks my blood has life eternal, and I will resurrect him on the last day” (Jn 6:53-4)

In Conclusion, let us remember that the Eucharist is the Sacrament of Love becoming total gift. The last words of Gerard, as reported by our nurse, Mr. Claude Beaulieu, were “Tell my confreres that I love them very much.” These words reveal the Pauline and Johannine spirituality of our confrere. These words are for each of us a precious exhortation to dedicate our lives to the service of God and others in love, following the example of the Virgin Mary, who stood at the foot of the Cross, and who was given to us as Mother (Jn 19: 25-27)

Thank you, Gerry, for your witness of faith and hope, and for your touching last words.

Jacques D’Arcy, p.s.s.
Supérieur provincial