

Notes Taken by Fr. Gilles A. Surprenant

**“Companions on the Journey.” Year of the Eucharist.**

**Notes Taken by Fr. Gilles A. Surprenant after the homily given by  
Bishop Richard Smith, National Spiritual Advisor, at the Opening Mass at St. Helen Parish.**

Cf. Sunday readings for the 20<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time.

(Please keep in mind that these notes were made too long after the Mass – 3 days – to remember clearly the bishop’s points. Even these few are rather obscured by my own thoughts.)

Bishop Smith shared his experience of contemplating the beauty of God’s creation here in Vancouver. At first there was fog and cloudy sky, which caused disappointment, but then when the sun broke out, there was a feeling of delight. By analogy, there is also a delight in us when we are able to see the beauty of God shining on the face of Jesus and in others. The fog and clouds veil that beauty, but when they move away and reveal the beauty that was hidden, we are delighted. This is also true in our relations with others.

Isaiah reports that the Lord takes delight in those who observe his commands and are faithful, and in his letter to the Romans, Paul observes that all of us have been locked one way or another in disobedience; so that the Lord might manifest his mercy to all. The Lord takes delight in freely showing us his mercy.

It was always God’s intention to show his salvation to all human beings and to make them all his children. The people of Israel had a clear sense of having been chosen by God. He wanted to use them to reach out to all the nations, but somewhere along the way, the Israelites began to believe that God’s gift of salvation was for them alone.

We see this reflected in Jesus’ encounter with the Canaanite woman. She was from the region of Tyre and Sidon, clearly gentile territory. She would have been regarded with contempt by even devout Jews, and when she made her request to Jesus, He showed her that He understood what she was made to suffer. “I know that you are made to feel as though it is not right for food to be taken from the master’s table and thrown to the dogs.” In his attitude, Jesus begins to draw aside the veil obscuring the beauty and dignity of this woman, and she very quickly catches on and replies “Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the master’s table.”

Jesus is very quick to appreciate and commend her faith, and by doing so, He reveals what was hidden, the beauty, dignity, and faith of this woman. This is what Jesus does for each and every one of us, and what He calls us to in turn do for others. By our words, attitude, and actions, we are to reveal rather than cloud the dignity and beauty of others, and communicate God’s love to them, the same divine love freely and generously given to us by the Father in Jesus.

In the Eucharist, Jesus unites us to his offering of Himself to the Father. He reveals to us the beauty and love of the Father, and reveals our own beauty and love to ourselves. He enables us to see and reveal the beauty and dignity of others. May He continue to enable all of us to go on contemplating the beauty of God in Jesus, delighting in his presence in ourselves, and reaching out with fidelity and generosity in mission to reveal the dignity and beauty of others.

This is the purpose of our time together on convention. We will be called to see and reveal the beauty and dignity of our sisters and brothers, and to take delight in them, who will in turn take delight in us.

**Louise shares who are her companions.**

Louise's Mom, her mate/husband, Mary our Lady are her companions supporting her, believing in her on her journey.

**Patricia shares who are her companions.**

Patricia finds her companions have been her mom, husband, and together they managed to care for her mother-in-law.

**Fr. Ray shares who are his companions.**

Edith Stein really sought the truth and helped him appreciate his parents, who held up the truth and taught their children to do so. He's from the Bronx, and as a child, would go with his friends to set fires in the woods just to see the firemen come. They'd throw snowballs down on people below, steal people's change and cigars. His parents moved to the suburbs for the sake of their children. At 21 his brother invited him to go to Canada with him, responding to Bishop Fergus O'Grady's ad: "Hard work, long hours, no pay. Contact...."

Aunt Mary is the "original Sister of Charity" 82. He has a Jesuit uncle. Bishop O'Grady was a true missionary with people all the time, and resonated what being a priest was all about. The Oblates were great priests, and Fr. Ray was only the second diocesan priest ordained for Prince George diocese 18 years ago. There were remarkable mentors for him over the years, especially an odd lady at a summer camp, who was really dedicated to the kids. He was touched with the desire to become a priest, went to the chapel and to see Bishop O'Grady.

When lay people live their faith and are generous to the Church, it puts our religious vocation into perspective, though we thought we've given a lot to the Church. There have been a lot of remarkable lay people who have gone through difficult passages in life and still generous to the Lord and to others. They have all inspired Fr. Ray to reach higher. He hasn't always been a follower of the truth, but has been inspired to know where the truth is, to be formed in his conscience, and to strive for the truth in his life.

**Tracy shares who are her companions.**

Tracy got into the wrong crowd and into drugs. She lost her life and faith. She moved to Vancouver hoping for a change to get off the street. They took her in at Covenant House providing she got a job and follow other conditions. She didn't and lost her place, having easy access to drugs. She was content for a while, but when welfare and a bed wasn't enough, she once again sought help at the shelter and began a treatment program with a counsellor. She got enrolled in a residential treatment center.

It was in an all women residential program that she began once again to get treatment and eventually moved into an independent living situation, with ongoing treatment and counselling. She was doing well, when her father died, and came close to losing it all. However, Covenant House, and a whole network of other institutions, helped her to stay sober and living a positive

life. She is grateful and is convinced that many still on the street are not there by their own choice, but only because it is the best option they have. Have we met someone like Tracy? Would we consider her our companion? How can we companion her? How can she companion us?

### **Jarka shares her story.**

Jarka is from the Czech Republic. Her greatest companion is our Lord. She wasn't close to Him when she came here and didn't pray. Two years ago she graduated with honors here, and could not have done it without her faith in the Lord. She started everything with prayer, for He is the most important part of her life now. When she approached anything with the faith of a child, she knew the Lord would be there. People offered her support, were so devoted to her well being that they seemed like angels.

Our Lady of Good Counsel Society were there to calm her fears when she took her baby steps in the faith since 1998. Since then she was able to accomplish various goals with their help and support. There have been many other witnesses who have been companions on the journey. They brought their strength, insight, courage, and humour, being someone to talk to, allowing us never to feel alone. We should therefore consider ourselves companions on the journey for one another, as reflections of the love of our God.

### **Celine shares who are her companions.**

She experienced a terrible life. It's a world that is so cold and dark that it's a hell on earth. The evil force of addictions brings you into a world where death is common place and trivial. God has been faithful and put her in a place where there is healing and life and love. She is grateful to Mary House, more than a recovery place, but a home. She gives thanks to Jesus for his love and for the good people. Addiction means to take captive or enslave, and the love of God is the only way to set the captives free. Please don't be part of a society that simply steps over the dead without recognition.

While she was addicted, she prayed, crying out to God, saying she needed someone to pull her out of the dark and throw her onto the bank away from the raging river, and given resuscitation, and now she can breathe again, and feels blessed beyond measure. She is attending college to become a substance abuse counsellor, and has a job. Life has changed so much. She had a hard time preparing for this talk, and prayed, and the Lord showed her, made her realize how much she loves and appreciates God's children.

She thanks her mom who went through it all and still loves her, pastors, spiritual parents, counsellors, volunteers, and all who prayed for her, and her Lord Jesus who has been all things to her, and all her companions, and all those who are companions to others on the journey of life, for showing her the way, encouraging and challenging her, speaking and teaching the ways of Jesus Christ, for tough love, for kindness when she was confused, for putting up with her in difficulties, for helping her find peace, for dreaming and crying with her, for sharing love and accepting hers, for making it possible for her to go back to college, for loving her still.

She thanks the Lord, who is her Love and her Everything. "By your love alone do I live and breathe, have I been healed. Thank you for choosing me."

## **Speaker: Mary as companion on our journey.**

Sandy Prather, Director of “Star of the North” in Edmonton.

Los Angeles Cathedral has tapestries of saints and companions of God all along the nave around the congregation – both canonized saints and holy women and men not so recognized or not yet – making visible the companionship we have in the communion of the saints, with whom we can and do have a true relationship; so that half of our companions and prayer partners are alive and half are dead. For example, she has in her companion group Eugene de Mazenod, her deceased mother, and so on. Each one witnesses to us something of our life of faith. Scriptural figures speak especially eloquently, because in them is the Word of God, for example: Abraham and Sarah, Moses barefoot before the burning bush, reminding us we are always on holy ground.

We identify with Peter who impetuously and with faith leaps out of the boat to walk on the water, and with Mary Magdalene who seeks the Lord, weeping, and finds Him in surprising ways. Therese de Lisieux witnesses to the little way. Mary also takes her place as one of the great companions on our journey; however, her exalted titles can put her out of reach. Vatican II puts her among the believers who ever points to Christ. As we look to her in the Scripture – only 13 passages – we ponder this woman, Miriam of Nazareth, who listened to and responded to God.

She was a peasant woman of Nazareth, wife of Joseph, and mother of Jesus. Much of what comes to us of Mary does so through the 2<sup>nd</sup> century Gospel of James. She is a woman of faith who responds to God in her life as we do. We can know her as a companion for us as we walk our faith journey.

Mary, a poor woman of the people for whom God has done great things. A spirit filled woman sensitive to the presence and word of God, a prophet whose word announced the awesome changes God’s coming would bring. A married woman who with her husband toiled hard to provide for her family, who pondered what God was doing in her life. Mother of an itinerant preacher, was concerned over her son, suffered his execution, and became an elder in the community of faith. See **Truly our Sister**. A theology of Mary in the communion of saints. By Elizabeth Johnson.

Mary is the one who says yes to God, she is disciple. She did no great deeds on her own, like Joan of Arc, or Catherine of Sienna, or Theresa of Avila doctor of the Church, or Julian of Norwich. Mary is the one who says yes to God and keeps on saying yes for the rest of her life, even though she’s not sure where that yes will take her. Cf the poem: “No Wind at the Window.” At the beginning of her life, she was a simple young woman who received an angel bringing God’s desire that she provide for Him a human nature and life. Despite the uncertainty, her response was, “Tell God I say yes.”

We agree with other Christians that the mark of the Christian disciple is the one who says yes to God, and she was the first one, a woman of positive action who cooperates with God though she does not know fully where it will lead. Fiat. Let it be done to me according to your word. God took flesh, a new thing could happen, a conception no one could conceive of. Mary joins the company of the scandalous foremothers in Matthew’s geneology. Tamar and Rahab are prostitutes. Bathsheba has a child conceived in adultery, and Ruth is a foreigner, a pagan moabitess. These links mark Mary as a courageous woman, marked as a woman in a difficult situation who can expect rejection or stoning.

Mary acts without consultation or permission of anyone. She stands alone before God. She renews her yes as she visits her cousin Elizabeth and celebrates the praises of God, and when she gives birth in a stable, when the shepherds come with amazing words, when she hears

awesome words at Jesus' presentation, when she must flee as a refugee with her child and husband, when she tells the servants to do whatever Jesus tells them, when she goes with her family concerned for Jesus' ministry and well being, when she accompanies Him to calvary, when He appears to them all, and when the Spirit comes.

Will we allow the Spirit to have his way with us as He did and does with Mary? Will we allow the Lord to come dwell in us and will we accept to conceive Him into our world, so desperately needing Him? Will we say yes to God throughout the circumstances of our lives, to give birth to Christ. What does it mean to give birth? It's about gestation and incarnation. By her cooperation, it is possible for Jesus to come into the world.

As women we know what it is to conceive and to gestate a child, with all the changes and processes developing within us. Being pregnant takes you over. Though not much may be visible at first, a lot is happening. You're never a little bit pregnant: either pregnant or not. So is it with discipleship. Jesus comes to take up residence within us. He told us He and the Father would come dwell in us. Discipleship takes us over too.

Mary is the Christ bearer, and her first action is to take Him to Elizabeth. Then He is only 12 when she loses control of Him and He insists He must be about his Father's business. She gives Him to the world and ponders this mystery. We too are to be Christ bearers to each other and to others, and Mary companions us in this call to discipleship.

Where have we been called to say yes to God?

Mary is the singer of the Magnificat and walks with the poor. She sings her song of revolutionary praise to Elizabeth and inspires us as we walk with the poor. The poor of the world have claimed this Mary as her own. Marian apparitions have one thing in common: they are to poor people, often children, the powerless and insignificant ones of the world. It is to these that Mary shows herself, and the poor ones always respond to her, can identify her, the one who is mother and who knows suffering and what it means to be powerless.

All day long there are people visiting her at her shrines like Guadalupe. Why are the little ones of God drawn to Mary? It is because she is one of them. She is one of the powerless, who knows loss and suffering, and knows that God acts in the poor and suffering and powerless. See **The Secret Life of Bees**. By Sue Monk Kidd. The story of Lily, 14, in deep south at time of the civil rights movement. Her mother died when Lily was 4, and now, in company of her black nanny, flees and with Rosaline ends up at the house of 3 black women who take them in. The eldest keeps bees. In the living room stands a figure, black, once on the prow of a ship. She knew it was Mary, though not dressed like her, a mix of mighty and humble.

The Daughters of Mary, black women, come to the humble home for a liturgy, which focuses on the statue of Mary. They say the Rosary, and August, the eldest sister, opens and reads from the Bible, Mary's Magnificat. Then she told the story of the statue, Our Lady of the Chains. Slaves prayed everyday and night for deliverance, for rescue, consolation, and freedom. One day a slave named Obadiah was loading bricks and saw the wooden figure of a woman float ashore. Her body grew out of what would have been the ship. Obadiah pulled the figure out of the water and struggled to set her upright. He then remembered the prayers they had been praying to God for deliverance. He then heard a voice say, "It's all right. I'm here now. You'll be all right."

People quickly heard the story, how she had spoken to Obadiah, but didn't know who she was. Not one of them knew. There was a woman named Pearl who walked with a stick. Everyone listened when she spoke. She said the figure was Mary, the Mother of Jesus, who knew all about suffering and trouble; so they knew that Mary had come to them, knowing everything about their pain and suffering. They painted a heart on her chest. Some planned and carried out escapes, while the others took inspiration from her. The master hauled her off and put her in

chains but without human hand she freed herself and returned – 50 times he tried it – and they called her Our Lady of Chains because she broke them.

Mary is the one who sings the praises of God, who delivers the poor and lowly in their suffering and poverty. Her song is of justice, of God's justice. He is the same God who Jesus knows as He goes to the outcasts, sinners, marginalized, all those who are scorned. Though socially insignificant, Mary goes to them and gives them a status they did not have before. She comes to those who risk and suffer violence. She is an immigrant in a strange land, denied justice, without food or a safe place to live. She knows sorrow yet hopes against hope and stands as a companion to all who suffer these injustices, to all who work to transform a society and culture of death into a culture and society of life.

Where has God done marvelous things in our lives as in Mary's? Where do we need to break chains as Mary and Jesus did, to set prisoners free?

Mary who says yes to the birth of Christ is our companion as we try to give birth to Christ in the world. She is companion – one who breaks bread with us – she walks with us and helps us in our efforts to respond to God's call to receive Him in our lives and bear Him to others. She exults at what God has done in her life and is given to us by God to also say yes to God on our journey of faith and life. Cf. statue of Our Lady of Combermere, the “questing Madonna” that I know of, and a similar statue at a retreat house Sandy mentioned, but I didn't get.

### **Sharing with Betty Anne Brown, National Spiritual Development Chairperson.**

Resource for our CWL “Power Breakfast” events.  
Betty Anne Brown, Wellington, ON. <[lzbrown68@aol.com](mailto:lzbrown68@aol.com)>

Remarkable CD used for prayer: [www.jeanettearsenault.com](http://www.jeanettearsenault.com)

Betty Anne shared some of what the Lord in prayer has inspired her to do. She took on the care of Hope her grandchild at the death of her daughter, the child's mother. A 12 year old sitter Lizzie would play with Hope while Betty Anne tended the vineyard here son-in-law put in after her husband died. Boasting how happy she was to have a job while her 15 year old brother Tommy didn't, Betty Anne asked her to have her brother call if he was interested in working, and he did. Betty Anne nourishes him with spiritual and philosophical discussions, and gives him lots of freedom and responsibility in the care of the vineyard, inviting him to consider himself the vineyard manager. Surprisingly, the teenager has taken on tremendous responsibility.

One Sunday evening, Betty Anne noticed she was having supper alone, because Hope didn't feel like eating and preferred to crayon in her book. She looked up at the Lord and she found herself wondering how many other people were sitting having dinner alone. So, with the permission of her pastor, she began to put a regular invitation in the parish bulletin: “An Open Invitation to Dinner” inviting any who might be alone for dinner to join her on Sunday evenings – “We have room for 9!” They began to come, more numerous over time, with a voracious appetite for sharing and storytelling. Her other daughter remarked they weren't so much a dinner of lonely people as a dinner of soloists!

### **Mary Heinzmeir?, President, Alberta Mackenzie Provincial Council.**

Cf. Fran Lucas of the project out of Edmonton, “Bizarre Women” who go around promoting the League and started a university council of the CWL.

**Pat Battensby, President, B.C. & Yukon Provincial Council.**

Cf. mass communication to M.P.'s on the **same day**. See women of courage, faith, grace, zeal for the Gospel, and love – the CWL is an instrument of God for the Church, the world, and for women. See Edith Stein on women and their role in the world. Get to know her; she can be an inspiration for our CWL life and work.

**Terry Scott, President, Manitoba Provincial Council.**

It's important to be friendly to other CWL members and to everyone. We appreciate the great dedication of CWL members and officers, with some traveling as much as 6 hours south from the far north for meetings.

**Gabriele Kalincak, President, Military Ordinariate Provincial Council.**

Consider a workshop from National: Companions on the Journey, the Trafficking of women and children, etc. Bring back the twinning of councils. Make a priority of recruitment and training of members.

**Anne Marie for Yolande Perry, President, New Brunswick Provincial Council.**

Retaining members Ok, but recruiting is a challenge. Purple rose vs trafficking.

**Marie Rainy, President, Newfoundland Provincial Council.**

Enjoyed a workshop from National: Companions on the Journey with also Bishop Smith. Go back to the basics, encourage renewal of commitment to our mission statement, and use the proven tools from national.

**Mary MacLeod, President, Nova Scotia Provincial Council.**

Plan to set up a CWL Council at St. F. X. U. It may begin a trend to approach university students. Distributed prayer services created by parish councils throughout the province. We're getting busy in preparation for next year's convention in Nova Scotia.

**Shirley George, President, Ontario Provincial Council.**

Elder Care a priority in Ontario: parishes taking initiative to give elders active roles in parishes, elder centered prayer services, etc. Consult Ontario Council regarding elder care. We're investigating factors in loss of members, other than death. Young women are impressed by the CWL's ability to communicate with government and put forth resolutions, and with Ontario bishops, bioethics institute, and other organizations.

**Judy Lewis, President, Prince Edward Island Provincial Council.**

We encourage use of the Liturgy of the Hours, collaborate with youth on promotion of life, held 2 Fall conferences in addition to provincial convention, with highlight seminar or talk on the discernment of our gifts. One on one still best method of recruitment.

**Pearl Bridgewater, President, Quebec Provincial Council.**

Will hold 3 October workshops for training of Provincial Council and match officers with a life member mentor. We need your help to make 2007 convention memorable.

**Mary Nordick, President, Saskatchewan Provincial Council.**

We knitted and distributed “Teddis for Tragedies” to affected children, along with shawls for other sufferers, assured of CWL prayers. We invited K of C brothers to collaborate in a project.

**Agnes Bedard, President, National Council.**

We are multitaskers. We hate and love to do so many things. We gather and do so many things to share and celebrate, and understand more clearly who we are and what we are about, and go forth to take the message to others. We are Catholic women who demand respect for the poor and abused, and people listen, and then we do it some more. We are not always successful, but we will not quit. We will hold the government responsible for the laws they have passed, for the consequences that will follow, and we will regain the rights that have been lost. We will regain the rights for the unborn soon.

As I walk across Canada I carry a love bag with letters, notes of praise to God, thanks, and supplication. Feel free to add your name or intention to the bag. We need to reinvigorate every single parish council, if every person on the council must do it.

**Bishop Smith – Monday Homily**

Before the actual homily, as I listened to the “Magnificat” within the Gospel, I had insight into women’s fruitfulness and thought of Betty Anne Brown and the conversation I had with her after the luncheon with the focus on Spiritual Development. She is very docile to the Holy Spirit and consequently very fruitful.

On arriving at the hotel, the Bishop discovered the Health Center and quickly began to use it, getting on the stationary bicycle, and watching people on the treadmills. It struck him that here they all were exerting themselves like mad, getting exhausted, and going absolutely nowhere. He realized we’re a treadmill society. We’re on the treadmill of selfishness, self-absorption, self-concern, and self-centeredness, making sure we get what we need and what we deserve.

**Bishop Smith – Tuesday Homily**

Again and again the Lord calls us to do what seems to be impossible. For example, the Lord says to Gideon, “Use that might within you to overcome the Midianites. Gideon says what

we often find ourselves saying, “Are you sure you’ve got the right guy?” He knew what God asked was impossible; yet God simply said, “I will be with you. That’s all you need to know.”

### **Bishop Smith – Teaching on the Eucharist**

Signs cannot reveal what they signify without a word to capture their meaning. Jesus performed deeds of power, but also accompanied them with a word expressing the meaning of what He had done: “Your sins are forgiven” or “No one comes to the Father except through me” and “He who accepts me accepts the Father.” By the words He added to the powerful actions He performed, Jesus revealed the truth of who He was and is, the Son of the Father, the only Saviour of the world. He also revealed that those He touched were loved by Him and by the Father. So Jesus revealed who He was and is through the interplay between the signs He worked and the words He spoke to accompany them and uncover their meaning.

The sign of the cross was a sign of humiliation as the worst possible form of execution and punishment for those without status in the empire. Jesus in humility accepted this sign but added to it a word to John and his Mother Mary, and to the Father. He showed his will that his disciple carry on caring for his Mother and that his disciples care for one another and honor Mary.

In quoting Psalm 22 “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?” Jesus actually was praying the whole psalm, according to current practice among his people. In the following verses there is a resolution to bring the good news of salvation to all the people, to call on them to come to the Lord, and so Jesus reveals Himself as the Saviour of all in the death He is about to accept, with faith in his Father’s love to defeat that death for us all. Jesus demonstrates his faith in the Father, and He calls us to that same faith.

The “Amen” which unites us to Jesus in his dying and rising leads us through Him to the Father. It is in the sacraments of the Church, above all in the Eucharist, that the dying and rising of Jesus is made present and communicated to us so that we can give our response of faith in the “Amen.” Just as Jesus revealed who He is by the interplay of word and sign; so too the offer of salvation in Jesus’ death and resurrection is made present in every generation and in every age in the sacraments and especially in the Eucharist.

What are we saying when we say “Amen” in the Eucharist, and are we ready to live out the consequences? The sign action in the Eucharist is the same sign action that Jesus undertook at the Last Supper, when He took bread and wine, blessed them, and gave them out to his disciples. We bless them through the words of the priest and give them out. It could simply signify the sharing of a meal among friends, but the Word is brought to bear upon that sign to bring out the meaning in the sign. The word spoken in sacramental celebration to communicate what is happening here is the Eucharistic Prayer prayed by the priest. This prayer recalls the wondrous ways God acted for his people in history, culminating in the greatest thing He has ever done, the incarnation of his Son, the death and resurrection of Jesus in the power of the Spirit.

The God who acted throughout history out of love to save his people even to the point of sending his Son to die on the cross for us is present now making present to us the very act by which Jesus died to save the world through his rising. As Jesus is the only way to the Father, so we offer ourselves to the Father in praise and thanksgiving. This happens through the Eucharistic Prayer prayed by the priest, and the assembly makes this prayer its own by saying “Amen”. It is sadly all too often not a great Amen but a hiccup. When we realize what has just been said, then it begs our faith response, so that we offer an energetic, profoundly felt, and believed “Amen.”

Since we were children, we were taught by our parents the truth of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist; so that we risk taking it for granted. Because of the word spoken by the

priest through the agency of the Holy Spirit, bread and wine are no longer, but instead what is before us is the true Body and Blood of Christ. We are speechless to understand this mystery, but falteringly use a word such as transubstantiation, which does not say all that is there, but at least says that what appears to still be bread and wine is no longer what it appears to be, but the Body and Blood of Christ.

When we come forward to receive the Lord in Holy Communion and say “Amen” to the Body of Christ, we recognize in faith that this is truly Jesus, and that I/we are coming forward to be nourished by Jesus, the one and only Lord. He brings us into communion not only with Himself and the Father in the Holy Spirit, but also with all the others who believe in Him and receive Him in this mysterious Holy Communion. We are companions, “with bread”, united in the deepest way possible in the Lord, because we receive the same Lord in his one Body and Blood. It is the risen Lord who is present in this Holy Communion, and his resurrection was the loving response of God the Father to his Son who offered his life for us.

God always responded to his people’s pleas in acts of rescue, and in Jesus’ resurrection, his response is a perfect response, offering us not simply mortal life and health, but eternal life, a share in the very life of the Blessed Trinity. This eternal life is the powerful love of the Father who can even raise the dead. There is nothing that I face that the Father cannot overcome. We say yes to all of this when we say “Amen.”

At the last Supper, Jesus said “This is my body broken for you, my blood poured out for you.” He was relating the supper to his gift of himself to the Father. Having said this, He offered the gift to the apostles, inviting them to be one with Him is his self offering to the Father, that is, inviting them to also offer themselves to the Father. What Jesus did on the cross on Calvary is made present here and now in the Mass. By saying yes, “Amen” to Him, to his gift to the Father, I am accepting to also offer my life to the Father as a gift of love in communion with Jesus.

When we celebrate the Eucharist, we are fashioned to be a sign, we become a sign for the world of the hope that is possible, of the communion that is possible when people bow down and worship God and say “Amen” to the mystery of who Jesus is and the gift He makes of himself for the world in the Father’s love and the power of the Holy Spirit. So we must make sure that the words we speak and the signs we show in what we do correspond with what we are living.

When the sign and the word don’t correspond, the result is confusion, for example telling children not to smoke while we light up. Our words and signs in our actions must correspond for the sake of the Good News, lest it be robbed of its power. This is the point of the saying, “If you are aware of having received redemption, please inform your face!” How can I be a Catholic yet promote abortion, same sex marriage, refusing to forgive, ignoring the poor, and so on? We risk confusing or undermining the message God has entrusted to us. A lot is at stake.

### ***Reflection Question for League Members***

I am a member of the Catholic Women’s League of Canada. What are the sign actions of my life – in how I relate to my family, parish, friends, colleagues, anyone, and to the world – that would contradict that word which is the League, and perhaps prevent others from knowing what the League is and joining? What are the sign actions of my life – in how I relate to my family, parish, friends, colleagues, anyone, and to the world – that really correspond to what the League is and would draw others to understand what the League is all about and attract them to join?

Pope John Paul II in his document relating his hopes for the year of the Eucharist spoke of his hopes for Eucharistic adoration, to find some time of stillness before the real presence of Jesus and come to a whole new appreciation of who Jesus is. That is why we have incorporated time of

adoration before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament during this convention. We come before the risen Christ in the Eucharist; so it is entirely appropriate that we lay out all our lives before Him, all those impossible circumstances we feel we cannot handle, but know He can handle.

All that we do in the time of adoration before the Blessed Eucharist must be related to what we do during the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. The “Amen” we say during the sacramental celebration of the Eucharist must be carried over into our prayer of adoration before the Lord. So there needs to be prayerful adoration and praise, but also stillness and waiting and expectation the Lord will reveal to me/us areas of my life that are contradictory to the Gospel. We ask Him that his love truly present in the Eucharist will burn away all in me that is contradictory to his love and truth, and make me more of a sign that corresponds to the truth of who He is and of his Gospel.

There can be no untruth when we come before Him who is the Truth. We ask Him to cleanse us of anything that is not truth, that contradicts the love Jesus is and offers us in the Holy Eucharist.

### **Betty Anne Brown – Spiritual Development**

Prayer and meditation has become an integral part of our council meetings. Spirituality distinguishes us as a Catholic women’s organization. As Bishop Smith reflected with us, we are called to translate our faith into our words and actions. We are called to solidarity with the poor and be companions with them. We are also called to good ecumenical relations, to journey with other Christians, to meet and dialogue and collaborate with them. Faith, poverty, and dialogue are words of timely significance. We are called to make a difference.

### **Notes from the Spiritual Advisor’s Luncheon Meeting**

Spiritual Advisors and other clergy would do well to give clear signals of support for the CWL and be present whenever possible and offer support in any other ways possible.

The CWL needs to raise its own profile in outreach, publicity, and recruitment. Overall, the League’s publicity to society at large is poor, with a very low profile, and Spiritual Advisors can help, encourage, and assist in finding ways to improve League publicity.

Diocesan leadership teams are willing to go out and promote the League.

The Spiritual Advisor does not just offer spiritual support, but also encouragement and help at all levels of League life and activity.

The primary purpose of the CWL is the spiritual development of the members.

Because of the unity enjoyed among League members at the four different degrees of affiliation, Spiritual Advisors and pastors may call upon League councils to assist with inter-parish relations, especially in those situations where parishes are clustered, joined, or suppressed.

CWL members and councils need a minimum of support, encouragement, and love; so Spiritual Advisors and pastors would do well to let them know how important they are. They are actually our best support in our mission of pastoring and developing the community of faith and the life of faith of all the faithful.

Spiritual Advisors would do well to work with Spiritual Development Chairpersons to expand the time allotted to spiritual development at regular council meetings at all levels.

We have a challenge of outreach to young women of other ethnic groups so that the demographics of the CWL may actually reflect the demographics of society at large.

Spiritual Advisors do well to exercise a greater role in presenting the teachings of the Church to League councils and members, especially in view of our battles over marriage and euthanasia, among others. CWL members want to get involved, and we are calling them to step out in faith and courage; so we must equip them, as well as the Knights of Columbus and all the faithful. Spiritual Advisors would do well to make these religious education sessions open to all, because we are spiritual advisors to the whole parish.

### **Bishop Smith – National Spiritual Advisor’s Report**

The women of the League love their priests and spiritual advisors, and these in turn love the women of the League. At a time when parishes must be twinned or otherwise changed, the CWL members, because of their unity, are in a unique position to play a role at the service of unity among parishioners of different parishes. The CWL needs to be less timid in promoting the League in parishes and in society at large. It would also be precious for members and officers to be flexible especially with regard to the time and place of meetings, in order to be more open to the life commitments of potential members, especially younger women. Flexibility is also needed with regard to the agenda, that is, to have more time dedicated to spiritual development and education. It’s about connecting with women and their needs and aspirations, and those issues for which they have a heart, as well as their need to grow in their faith, which is the primary purpose of the League.

The Bishop has found a marvelous unity among members in their great diversity. They want to engage in the new evangelization, which means we just can’t remain in what activities have been familiar to them. The League in all its members is called to continue engaging society and government, as well as the general population, and women in particular.

### **Cecile Miller – Christian Family Life**

Our government is accelerating a process of development of a culture of death. Now that they’ve changed the laws on marriage, they want to reopen the discussion of euthanasia and assisted suicide. The League has good workshops to educate and inform what these processes are and what the Church teaches. See also the fine materials published by COLF, the Canadian Coalition for Life and the Family and the Prevention of Euthanasia Coalition. We must also defend our beliefs with regard to Christian marriage and be vigilant to defend our priests when pressure is put on them. See also the kit on elderly care. There is a new idea to launch a Catholic Girls League – watch for developments and news.

### **Ann Doucet – Community Life**

A great deal needs to be done at home and abroad: work with and advocacy for immigrants and aboriginal people in Canada, and for the people of poor and developing nations. Among the issues are the prevention of and education regarding family violence, the promotion of fair trade products, the defense of farmers’ rights, and many others affecting the dignity and rights of persons, including their right to a living wage.

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### **Velma Harasen – Education and Health**

Several resolutions and actions are ongoing, either initiated or supported by the CWL. The Catholic identity of health care and educational institutions, where one still exists, is challenged by the diminished presence of religion. We favor Mater Care and the Holy Childhood, among others.

### **Bishop Fred Henry – Comments**

The bishop is delighted to be present and to see how efficiently the work is dispatched in this assembly, and wonders how the CCCB might benefit from a workshop by the CWL on how to conduct business more effectively.

In the process of speaking out on marriage, he got bruised at times but found great courage from the prayer support by the CWL. He felt carried in the Spirit of God with a tremendous prayer team behind him.

As believers in and followers of Jesus, we will find ourselves more and more in a prophetic role; as society no longer automatically approves of our beliefs. We will have to be engaged in debate with society and give expression to our values and beliefs, and win some and lose others. The change in the marriage law is a wakeup call to become more proactive in our celebration of marriage and anniversaries every year, preparation for marriage, and support of marriage.

If we are to have an impact on society, we must demonstrate our values by our words and actions, prioritizing the dignity and value of the children, the most vulnerable and too often forgotten in these debates by society and its institutions. This was only round one, and we're in the battle for the duration. He thanks the League for its support and prayers.

### **Danielle McNeil-Hessian – Legislation**

This work is most important as the CWL remains vigilant over the legislation coming out of Parliament and provincial Legislatures and the consequences which ensue from legislation, in order to watch over the quality of life in the land and to continue to advocate for the dignity and freedom of the human person before God.

Now that all federal laws in the land have been amended to the changed definition of marriage, we must remain vigilant to see to it that federal assurances of the freedom of pastors not to perform same sex marriages will be implemented in the provinces and territories.

The next battle will be to have Parliament maintain assisted suicide as an indictable offence, lest the elderly, handicapped, sick and weak find their lives imperiled by overzealous

health care institutions and workers in the absence of family to care for them and defend their right to life.

N.B.: We could make prominent the information for contacting the Canadian Anti-Euthanasia Coalition, which keeps the latest information and inventory of resources.

### **Dr. Rayleen De Luca – Resolutions**

Though quite daunting, the work of meeting with legislators in Parliament and in the provincial and territorial legislatures is very rewarding, and we have been assured that the CWL as an organization enjoys high priority of attention from legislators. This is due to the very high quality of our briefs, resolutions, and background research and the pertinence of our insights and practical suggestions in defense of the dignity and freedom of each and every person.

### **Marie Cameron – Laws**

The League is a very dynamic organization, with constant evolution and improvement of our laws and procedures, from parish councils through diocesan and provincial and territorial councils, without whom none of these changes and improvements would take place.

### **Agnes Bedard – International Relations**

Agnes and Lorette Noble will attend the meeting in Atlanta in September.

### **Claire Heron – WUCWO Delegate**

Claire brings a suitcase of topical medications for WUCWO members from other nations in need of these. The next WUCWO General Assembly will take place in Arlington, Virginia May 31<sup>st</sup> to June 7<sup>th</sup> and the theme will be: “Women Peacemakers United in Faith and Action.” The open sessions of this AGM will take place June 5<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup>. Members are encouraged to attend. The CWL has cooperated and participated in WUCWO since 1928.

Claire’s name has been retained with 3 others for general secretary of WUCWO. See our CWL website for the latest WUCWO Board meeting report.

### **Lorette Noble – Talk on Membership**

Lorette’s Threesomes –

- ★ What is our Council’s image – 3 words:
  
- ★ Why would anyone want to join us? 3 reasons:
  
- ★ What actions can put together an action plan to attract them to join us? 3 actions:

As a parish council member:

(Cf. President Kennedy's inaugural address: "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country.")

★ What do I expect of the League? 3 things:

★ What can I offer the League? 3 gifts:

★ How can I help in our Council's Action Plan? 3 ways:

Next year in Halifax, we will share with one another what we have done and what has come of this personal and collective exercise of reflection and action to develop our membership.

### **Marie Cameron – On Conflict**

"Where two or more are gathered, there will be conflict." Why? We are different, have different backgrounds, views, and gifts. Conflicts may be why members don't renew their own membership or encourage others to join. We all carry conflict around as well from home or work. If the member's mind is too agitated as she arrives at a council meeting, a brief token scripture reading or prayer won't be enough.

We need our councils and gatherings to become small faith sharing communities willing to reflect on Scripture and what the Word of God has to say to us about our conflicts and personal situations. We need to connect in a meaningful way with the Lord, to hear anew from Him the love He has for us, for me.

Only then can a member once again be able and willing to look upon the other members and guests as another person loved by God, and to accept them as they are. Do I take other members as is? The only person I can change is me. When conflict arises, I need to look at the reasons for the conflict, and see what I can change to mitigate the conflict. As Jesus' followers, we need to widen our view of what's happening to see the bigger picture and also to see the other persons as persons loved by God.

Only by practicing these principles with the scripture passage become true for us: "Where two or three gather in my name, I am there among them."

### **Danielle McNeil-Hessian – The CWL as bridge builder in the local church.**

Everywhere in the land, our Church needs to be revitalized, parishes are in flux and often in a situation of amalgamation or closure. What role does the CWL have in building bridges among the faithful in parish situations of flux, change, amalgamation, or closure?

We are called to be instruments of peace, as parishes come together or are closed, and as CWL councils follow suit. Helping members realize their freedom to discuss, discern, and decide their own future actually opens their minds and hearts to the possibilities.

## **Agnes Bedard – The CWL embracing change and the future.**

None of us is perfect. We are imperfect. None of us really like change. Change is scary and can prevent us from seeing the possibilities.

Where do I fit in my church, and if someone were to sit in my place, would I be able to assist at Mass? It's very important for my devotion to sit in my particular place. Change is hard. We need to remember to celebrate all that is good, and not just focus on the problems.

We have been here at a convention where really good stuff has happened. Change is hard but it can also be good. For example, we used to work on the resolutions on paper, and now we use computers and projection screens. It's much better, not perfect, but much better.

If something can be improved, then let's change it and let change be our friend. Change depends on us. We want to change our parish council, and the first thing we need to change is our attitude. What worked 30 years ago doesn't work now – where are the people who sat around the table 30 years ago? How much has the world turned in the past 30 years? No one has to change, they are free not to go with the change, but we are also free to accept it.

I can only change myself. In your council, remember that if you are doing what you've always done, you'll get what you've always gotten. If you have 30 members and the parish has 300 families, then what is going on? If the CWL is a Catholic women's organization, then should not all Catholic women belong to it?

**What is...?** In your family life, in your parish life, in your work life, and so on....

**What could be...?** Are there things that could be changed, that should be changed? What wonderful things can we celebrate?

**What should be...?** What things really need to change?

Have I changed? Ask these women in front here. There is so much I didn't know and thought I couldn't be. We aren't finished yet, but only when we are finished. Until then, Jesus says, "Come walk with me. Come and be with me."

There are 4 things we can never take back. The spoken word – the missed opportunity – the spent arrow – the....

None of us is perfect. We are imperfect. None of us really like change. Change is scary and can prevent us from seeing the possibilities.

## **Bishop Fred Henry – Homily – Closing Mass**

The bishop is delighted to be present and to see how efficiently the work is dispatched in this assembly, and wonders how the CCCB might benefit from a workshop by the CWL on how to conduct business more effectively.

Transcript of notes taken by Fr. Gilles A. Surprenant, Montreal Archdiocesan Spiritual Advisor

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