

Days of meeting of our English Priests with Archbishop Jean-Claude Turcotte.

I found it amazing how our meeting with the Archbishop brought into the clear light of your Word the convergence between what has been happening to me and our common situation as priests of Montreal. I'll quote some of the Cardinal's remarks here in order to continue my personal reflections on where I've come from and where I'm going.

Cardinal Jean-Claude Turcotte's Opening Remarks

"The Church today needs believers of conviction with strong faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior. The Church needs priests who go from a priesthood of priestly behavior to a priesthood of creativity to bring forth people of conviction in their faith. We need the ability to delegate much of what we have done to the laity with trust that they can do at least the minimum with God's help. We have all received our call from Jesus Christ, and now need new ways to carry out our ministry with creativity. We need to become witnesses as well as teachers. We need to find new ways to live together. We also need to maintain our communion with Rome and the universal Catholic Church.

Moreover, as priests, it is our responsibility to form consciences. Then, we must let them decide in their own conscience, and refrain from deciding for them or trying to impose our decision on them. As we give the Word to people, we must also let Him work in them. We are sinners, and the Church is an assembly of sinners trying to follow Christ. That doesn't mean we should stay down when we fall; on the contrary, with God's help we must get up again and keep trying.

In the past, the Church was a barracks, where everyone obeyed commands, listened to orders, and marched to the same drum. Now the Church is a fair, where infinite variety is found. Priests must be lovable; then people will listen to them. This love is the principle of unity and community. Our goal for these two days together is to seek together a new mind, a new mentality, a new attitude, a new paradigm for living and ministering as priests – in effect, we need to put on the mind of Christ.

The Cardinal's Convictions

We are all searching, listening, praying, and looking for ways to build the Church. I'd like to share with you some convictions that I have that offer a perspective on this enterprise of building the Church together. First, we have to experience going from an old Church to a new Church. It is good that we draw JOY from our involvement in our ministry and among the people. We inherited a Church with a lot of parishes. In this Church which was built up over many generations, the parish was a self-sufficient center able to give all the services the people needed. This model worked especially well in rural settings. The pastor was a personality of importance, and everything passed through his hands. He had assistants who did what he said, and laymen who also helped – these were all "yes" men.

In the 1960's all that changed. Now we have a new situation, but it is a difficult situation. We still have the old Church burdening us; while we look to the Church we dream of, but the model of that new Church is not clear. As soon as we begin to articulate that dream, we discover that we have people all over the spectrum. The only model we have that can respond to the need of our situation is that of the early Church with its small Christian communities. These were groups of people deeply convinced due to their experience of Christ and his Gospel. They often lived together, worked together, served together (see Acts 2:42). At their head was a WITNESS of Christ who shared with them all he had experienced of Christ. The people clung to him and his every word, fascinated by his stories of Christ. These first pastors were witnesses, talking about Christ – human and divine – about Gospel values,

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prayer, and the universal call to communion and to spreading the Gospel. They were so attached to Christ that their love for one another was impressive and attractive to others. Today's Project is to be as close as possible to the early Church. We must be faithful to the assembly, in sharing and trust, to common and daily prayer, to the teaching of the apostles, and to the breaking of the bread.

The Cardinal's Convictions about Consequences

1. *We must put into place small faith communities where people know each other and are known, love each other, and can satisfy their hunger and thirst to know Christ and his Gospel.*
2. *The pastor is to have nothing to do with organization but deliver the Word of God. This means he must DELEGATE ALL PRACTICAL QUESTIONS to responsible members of the community.*
3. *The role of apostles, bishops, priests, is to bring the Word of God, prayer, and the Sacraments to keep the community vitally linked to God, the Source of all its life.*
4. *Their role is first of all to be witnesses to Christ. Remember my sharing with you and all the priests in 1997 – every priest has, at the root of his call, the realization that Christ's love is for us/me and a consequent desire to follow Christ. He came to us in his Word.*
5. *So it is that Christ calls us to become men/priests of his Word.*
6. *We are called to trust, have confidence in the People of God – don't have the same experience and formation as we who were formed by the Council of Trent – keeping in mind they have been formed by modern society and the little bit of Vatican Council II that they may have received.*

The Cardinal's Convictions about Principles

1. *We'll regroup parishes only on condition that the people are consulted and give their consent – both the Fabrique and the Assembly of Parishioners.*
2. *Don't be afraid to consult people in assemblies – at first, they'll defend what they have, that's normal. Give them the facts of the dilemma – they are intelligent and practical – and you'll find them offering possible solutions.*
3. *People often insist that the diocese has made a master plan for fusions – forget it – it is only over the Archbishop's dead body that such a plan would be made. The Episcopal vicars are the Archbishop's collaborators, and they share his responsibility, and they work with people to find solutions that are workable and acceptable.*
4. *Be confident that the baptized have received the same Holy Spirit we have received; even though they are filled with democratic and worldly principles. Learn to delegate: be "lazy" to do as little as possible ourselves, but "curious" to know as much as possible what's going on. Trust the people to know what needs to be done and to find ways to do it with the knowledge of our love and trust in them and patience. It is out of their Baptism and Confirmation that they are called to be evangelizers and responsible with us for carrying out the mission Christ has entrusted to his Church."*

End of Cardinal's Observations and Presentation

1. Current Literature on the Priesthood and Fraternal Discussions.

These past few years, several brother priests have talked about several books reflecting on the changing situation of the priest in our evolving Church, rooted as it is in the midst of our modern

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culture and society. All along, I felt that these studies and discussions were timely and important, but somehow I couldn't quite get into them, because I needed more clarity about the nature of my own struggle. I could see the relevance of the observations and theses posited by the various authors, and I sympathized with the views of my fellow pastors and other brothers in the Presbyterate; yet I was not ready to articulate what my own experience was. I began to know and to say openly that I felt that I/we needed formation as priests – especially as pastors – in the area of collaboration with the laity and formation of the laity to their roles in the mission of the Church. We need help in learning how to discern what the gifts of the laity are, how to know which people within our parish to call on for assistance, and how to work with them on a team. We have heard much in the past 20 years about the importance of priests practicing with the laity a true co-responsibility, but little about how to do that.

Now I feel as though I can go back and read those books that I've acquired from the vantage point of my own need for direction. Upon my return from vacation, as we priests meet together, pray and discuss our Archbishop's directions, we'll continue to discern together how to enter into this new paradigm he has invited us to adopt – looking for ways to return to the model of the early Church – accepting to become living witnesses of You, dear Lord Jesus, having as we do a very personal experience of You risen, living now, and truly directing both our hearts and your Church. You will also guide us as we work with your people to establish opportunities for all of them to enter into small faith communities, where they can know and be known, love and be loved, and so grow closer to You.

2. Participation in a Jesus + Caritas Retreat with French Priests June 15-20th.

*This retreat was given by the Holy Cross Father Raymond Gourde, c.s.c. at Ermitage Ste. Croix in Pierrefonds, near Becket. These uncertain times are so evident, that he began with the question, “**What Must We Do?**” This was the Sunday night opener, a question we all ask.*

I missed the Monday conference as I went in to St. Mary's Hospital for day surgery to correct a small hernia. The rest of the week, I was in some pain and much less mobile than I am used to being. I made good use of a wheel chair the sisters brought out for me, and the brother priests were very kind, gracious, and affectionate in their eagerness to help me get around – pushing the wheel chair wherever I wanted to go, carrying my meal tray, and so on. As the week went by, the grace You gave me to accept gladly to allow these brothers to assist me became a living and present analogy which helped me understand what has been going on in my life and ministry and also where You want to bring me.

For far too long now, I have allowed myself to feel excessively responsible in life. It began when I was working with my father on the farm, where I would feel a burden to rescue him from the disorder of his tool shed when I got tired of hearing him complain about it. I then became very good at rescuing people from their own consequences in ministry as well. As a result, at Becket I have maneuvered myself into a situation of control, without even approving of control. For years I prayed Bob Bedard's prayer, “Lord, show me how to get out of your way.” Now, I really need You to help me do that. So the wheel chair was great – You showed me that it can be quite pleasant to acknowledge my helplessness or need for assistance, and to allow others to do all that they can do and offer to do, and even to ask for help when others are not forthcoming at the moment that I need their help.

✠ *In any event, the Monday theme was quite significant: “**Assuming our marginality.**” It is refreshing to consider that You yourself, Lord Jesus, were a marginal figure as a teacher. You taught in a way that was so different, that You were on the fringe of the established authorities. You were*

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further marginalized by your willingness to associate with people already considered marginal by both the authorities and all those who considered themselves religious. You were even more deeply on the fringe by your dedication to knowing and doing the Father's will and not your own. This meant that You had to remain free to see, moment by moment and day by day, what the Father would ask of you as people came to You and You went to them. You were not a bureaucrat, nor were you big on organization, long-term planning, and paperwork. Yet, the best plans were the ones your Father inspired You to adopt and follow. So be it with me.

✠ *Tuesday's theme was "**Learning to speak to the world about salvation.**" The essential of our identity is Your desire in me. You were the first, Lord Jesus, to seek to live out your desire for the Father: You came to bring a fire to the earth as well as liberty to captives, and You are the Good Shepherd. Your desire in me has been a familiar fire burning deep within me as far as I can remember. What do your people see in me? Your tenderness, your peace, your mercy?*

If the 1960's claimed You were dead, it was because social progress due to the advances of science and technology gave people the impression that all their socio-economic, political, and cultural dreams seemed possible and within the reach of human capacity and ingenuity. So the question society asked was, "What more can God or faith in him give me than I can already have?" "What is it that you Christians think that we need to be saved from?"

If we are to find answers to these and other questions your people ask, we must live close enough to them to observe what they are living, suffering, struggling, and desiring. Then your Spirit will inspire us to see what Word of yours they need to hear and how they need to hear it so as to recognize in it the deepest desire of their hearts, planted there by their Father.

Varonne wrote that You, Lord Jesus, are not a God who came to solve our problems, nor is your Father an angry God who demanded your human death in order to appease his anger. Rather, You came to reveal a salvation – not by expiation – but by the revelation of love as a living relationship which bestows life in abundance. Although your proclamation situated You on the margins of society and raised objections, You fully assumed your words and actions and their consequences – even to the point of accepting your passion and death. Schillebeeckx wrote that You revealed a way and practice of relationships that bears life. The kingdom of God You revealed is truly a reign which is the mutual relationship of God with men and women in a peaceful society from which has been removed all trace of constraint or division.

However, what You reveal and live surpasses our capacity to imagine, and we are afraid of losing out. We end up having to learn the hard way at times that it is true and authentic relations that nourish love and heal, not psychological tricks or other gimmicks or programs. We are also to imitate You and not be quick to offer others solutions; rather, like You, we are to listen. It is an authentic relationship with others that we are to offer them. This is at the heart of Christian therapy and ministry. It is also the key to the warm and effective hospitality offered in such movements as twelve-step programs. These are signs of the Kingdom and they heal. Reconciliation is the restoration of relations with You our God and with other people.

✠ *Wednesday, our theme was "**Learning together to become human.**" We are what we become in our relations with others and with our God. We have been formed by external pressures and our neighborhood and way of life, and we bring our pattern of relating wherever we go. To the extent that I enter deeply into what I am, my desire for God in You, then I modify my relations in order to find and*

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give greater life. In our Jesus + Caritas fraternities, we try to live a spirituality of Nazareth. It is very incarnate in real living, centered in God incarnate and present. It is a spirituality of the periphery; as the important people lived in Jerusalem, not in Nazareth, and it expresses itself in a way of prayer centered on the "Our Father".

We can verify the truth of this revelation which You have brought both in the Gospel and in our own experience. You came as man in order to come face to face with people, offering to restore their relation with the Father through You, and through You with others. They in turn could then do the same for others. As priests, we can certainly verify the effectiveness and power of accepting to relate to people. So often, just accepting to listen to someone and talk to them begins to restore their own ability and willingness to relate in life-giving ways.

The October 2002 discussion paper "Orientations for the Formation for a Christian Life." put out by the Quebec bishops will probably become an important milestone in the way we approach our priestly ministry and collaboration with the laity for the future of our Church. The primary principle it posits is that from now on, evangelization must begin with favoring the humanization of each person living today, with the expectation that this in turn will have effects on both the Church and society. People go to extremes today to find wells from which to draw waters that might increasingly humanize their existence, but all too often consider the Christian faith and tradition as insignificant or even irrelevant. We need to put aside efforts to transmit the faith by inculcating a doctrine or answering questions that people no longer ask themselves. See *Devenir Humain*. Yves Burdelot, Cerf. Paris 2002. *La Fragilité de Dieu selon Maurice Zundel*. Ramon Martinez.

According to Martinez, "in order to be born human, one must pass several boundaries. At least four. First is the boundary of **matter**: one becomes alive by tearing oneself away from that which is inert. The second is **instinct and animal limits**: having access to spirit yields a human. Third, the human being must surpass the risk of remaining enclosed in **the collectivity**: where the individual only acquires his identity by his conformity to the modes and values of the group. This third boundary is that of **recognizing the human individual** as a unique subject, a source of choice and decision – a recognition that can only come from the look of others – and it is at this level that a free person exists. But have we reached the end of what is human if one does not question the use this person makes of the self? That's because there remains a final boundary to cross: that **the free person** – and so capable of choice and love – having oneself the experience of being loved, **also accepts to love**, that is, accepts in turn to recognize others and to act to help them grow in humanity themselves. This describes an ideal progression....

Too often another boundary – some call it an insurmountable barrier – rises before the individual seeking to humanize himself: the obstacle which is evil, its enigma and the terrible mechanisms which cause it to multiply itself. We will never finish confronting it without ever being able to elucidate it. But after all if evil were entirely external though an inseparable but painful companion to all of our lives, human dignity would be spared by daring to confront it to make it recede; if only momentarily. But the enigma dramatically redoubles itself when the human being reveals itself capable, by itself and willingly, of engendering evil. Our freedom allows us to do evil. Man can destroy man.

Throughout human history, through various conflicts at various levels – from states to individuals – it is like a tide of folding in upon oneself and of the search for domination that sweeps, in each man, humanity towards inhumanity. Each one can, by his free choices, add to the flow of that tide which sweeps him away. So, if one believes that success for humanity is nevertheless possible, one must demonstrate that putting salvation to work will always and essentially consist in taking a stand to

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reverse this situation, that is in hand to hand combat against all that harms what is human in every man."

God's answer, in Jesus, is the Christian proposal, based in the very existence of Jesus and how He lived his life: we are to reverse the tide of evil by choosing to live in relationship with and for the good of others. We are to take into account the other at the same time that we take ourselves into account. Jesus was incarnate, He existed, and He stood straight and tall. Jesus entered into relationship with others, and permitted them in their turn to stand straight and tall. We collaborate together to help each other become more human. Jesus left us the sacraments; they continue to be there and active, to enable us to build up what is human in us. It would be interesting to consider how we could fashion a pastoral approach around what we live together in the Jesus + Caritas fraternities. People seek to become human, and they look for a community within which they may do so, where they will be listened to and heard. Because of original sin, we are born with an infinite desire but limited horizons. The desire presses within us, and not knowing what to do, we go off in different directions, which can take on characteristics of tyrannical appetites. The evil one intervenes indirectly, and directly but rarely, to hinder within us this process of becoming human.

This Christian proposal almost always requires the dismantling of the various images of God we give ourselves and which diverse societies develop. Jesus reveals a tenderness of God not in the form of embraces but in the midst of the risks we are called upon to take. Zundel said that believing in God commits us to nothing, but believing in man commits us to everything. See his book Devenir homme – expérience de Dieu. We are sons and daughters of God, and our relationship of faith, love, and hope in Jesus leads us to take decisions like his own. Meister Eckhart taught that the depths of the human soul and God are the same thing. We are already divine in God, so follows our call to become human, to learn to love, and to relate.

✠ *On Thursday, Fr. Raymond Gourde's theme was "**Living the experience of the exile and finding our heart again.**" He referred us to three of Sebastian Moore's books, especially **Let His Mind Be in You** and **Jesus, the Liberator of Desire**. If love is true, it evokes in the other his desirability and gives him birth. Then the other, now capable of loving, can return a purified love that, in turn, evokes our own desirability. However, we resist this call to be desirable, lovable. We resist God's love and the love of others. The poor and the sinners were drawn to Jesus, because in Him they sensed their own desirability, discovering in Him a God and Father who loves them and us.*

Those who had abandoned themselves to sin but camouflaged it under the appearance of observance of the law could not endure Jesus' freeing message. The Chosen People were not naturally the people of God. They experienced this most keenly during the exile, since they could not endure being outside the Promised Land and away from the stability of the Temple sacrifice. This caused them to question whether God was faltering on his promises and on his fidelity, and opened up a great work of reflexion, through which Israel discovered the true face of God and a more authentic understanding of the call of the Chosen People. They had identified themselves with the temple, the king, the holy land, and the great exile prophets forced them to dismantle their illusions and gave birth to hope in God. For example, Jeremiah announces a new covenant at the same time that he transmits condemnations and curses. The second Isaiah (40-55) testifies to a disappointing return of the people to the holy land, and gives birth to the vision of the suffering servant. Through him, the salvation of all comes by way of a purifying suffering, which is a new conception of the messiah and also modifies the relationship of the people of God with Him as well as their identity.

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Our experience is very similar to this. Religious communities excessively identified with their work later fell apart when they lost that work. We ourselves have identified with various externals and trappings of the priesthood and with various expressions of priestly ministry. We must break our identification with these things or let go of them in order to remain open to where the Spirit would lead us to make us more attentive and responsive to the people of today with their particular struggles and poverty. Otherwise, we will not be able to know how they need to hear the Good News, which must touch them in their need. Examples of identification are with: institutional power, authority and influence, opportunity to address the whole people on Sunday, a disconnected sacramental religiosity, focus on the sanctuary, and free services.

✠ *On Friday, our theme was “Sharing our spiritual experience with others.” Although in every way human, Jesus was a man whose whole way of living showed Him to be a man for other – for other human beings but also for God, the source of his being, whom He named his Father. However, He does not give to others out of contempt for himself. He graciously receives his life from his Father and values it, at the same time that He opens himself to others and loves and values them.*

Secondly, Jesus' commitment to others is so incarnated that his entire self is for others and is a source of life and nourishment for others. Jesus is that rare and unique human being who is completely identified with the meaning and purpose of his life. He is what He says. He really is the truth, the way, and the life, because his very being and relating to others draws them into the truth, the way, and the life. Jesus is effective in both giving expression to the life and love he shares with his Father, and in drawing others into a full participation in this life and love of the Father by way of relations with the Father through the Son in Jesus and with others by way of all that Jesus brings forth within them.

Thirdly, this total commitment of Jesus always tends to lift up the others whom He meets and with whom He chooses to relate, or who simply see and hear Him. Salvation – both in Jesus and in those whom He saves – is characterized by self-confidence or self-assurance. Jesus puts all his trust in the Father, and those whom Jesus saves in turn put all their trust in Him and through Him in the Father's love. Jesus calls others to dare to trust in themselves, or rather to trust in the gift of God within them, which is their faith. His trademark expression upon healing or forgiving sins is, “Go now, your faith has made you well.” So this is a trust, a confidence that is always open to its source: God the Father and his beloved Son whom He has sent into the world to save the world. This is why Jesus' preference is for the poor, or those who recognize their need to be saved, their need to trust in the gift of life the Father offers. Jesus has come to give knowledge of God through experience of Him and his saving love.

However, the movement and effect of Jesus' passing is to restore the dignity of humanity in each person – both in the one helped and in the one helping. It is not necessary for the Good Samaritan to be a believer or religious man for him to restore the human dignity of the man who was beaten and left for dead on the road. Meanwhile, the religious faith of those who passed the man by without helping him proved to be inadequate to elicit their compassion. It is out of compassion that the Son of Man came to earth and restores us that we too might in our turn have compassion on others.

✠ *This capacity for compassion is at the heart of what the Church is called to be. Scott Peck in *Refonder l'Église* shows how often great projects in the Church first elicit harmony in the initial excitement of a new project, but soon enough within months people become aware of their differences of opinion and personality, develop the desire to change others, and all falls into chaos. These people*

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need to be accompanied and brought to empty themselves of their intentions to change others by asking them to express what they hope, desire, and want to do and listen to what others have to say about that too. Only then can they have compassion for the others and allow to emerge a true community of mind, heart, and spirit.

In this process, people don't want us to talk to them about God, and we haven't to impose on them our own experience of God, but we only need to share our experience with them in order to help them see themselves and find themselves increasingly in the light of God. When we help each other to see ourselves connecting with the Word of God, there happens a synergy which gives new life to everyone. See Cozzens' book in the chapter on Servant of the Word.

As Jesus said, He and the Father are always working. The Father is always looking with love upon his children, but all too often there are veils preventing his children from seeing the love with which He looks upon them. As Jesus brought clarity to people's eyes so they could at last see themselves loved, so we are called to do the same for others. Our response to the Lord's call looks different for each one of us. Here are the various images shared by the priests at the retreat to express what the call looked like for them at this time.

We are like itinerants walking towards the unknown yet filled with hope, with the simple joy of itinerants who have left everything behind, like the poor who demonstrate for justice – they have nothing, yet they can smile. As St. Irenaeus said, "the glory of God is man fully alive." We can see this in the simplicity of the Church's great movements such as Cursillo and services to the poor. It is good not to be satisfied with movement towards fullness of humanity and dignity and also invite others to seek and accept the gift of faith and to relate to the Lord.

I discover my heart and bring others to discover who they are, their deep heart.

We see barriers fall, as in the ministry to the port, where the chaplain was driven from his office and left with only the option of going out to meet the seamen on their ships, very much like a missionary. Well this brought much fruit and the joy of the Gospel. Cultural parishes are reaching out to local communities and doing things together. Evangelical and Pentecostal chapels are springing up and reaching youth. This is good news and we can learn from them.

We have pearls in our Church, like treasure in earthen vessels, such as l'Arche and the ministries to Aids victims. People need intermediaries to help them become free of the obstacles that prevent them from seeing they are loved by God, exactly as Jesus does for us. The Lord's promise of a new covenant in Jeremiah 31 is being fulfilled, as people come to know the Lord themselves from his presence and action within them.

Love has a beautiful name in everyday life, in families and at funerals, where there is experienced some intergenerational solidarity. There are returns to the incarnation for those who are beginning again after years of being disconnected or far away. They are being brought back by new prophets who go out to them and speak words of truth and life to them. There is happiness in being a pastor in this world of today; as through the ambiguity, we walk along with people, without judging them, searching together, and offering a ministry that is a leadership through accompaniment and mentoring. Even in chaos there are signs of hope as we see the stages in community formation.

Because listening brings the heart to name itself, we are called to share our experience of God, listen to the journeys of others, read together the action of the Spirit, giving thanks at the Eucharist for all the experiences where salvation is happening – the new face of the priest.