

HOMILY
Redemptorist Jubilee Celebration Liturgy

Fr. John McGowan, C.Ss.R.
(50th Jubilee of his ordination)

St. Clement Church, Saratoga Springs
July 11, 2007

As an altar boy in OLPH, Brooklyn, I grew up with the first mass experience. Jubilees were rare and C.SS.R. funerals were even rarer. We all knew the mid June and early July First Mass Sundays. Young, handsome newly ordained Redemptorists would return to the parish to celebrate their first solemn high mass. It was a spectacular event! Standing on the top step outside the rectory door, the newly ordained was flanked by a deacon, a sub deacon and an archpriest with two columns of altar boys stretching down to the sidewalk. They were the reviewing stand watching the parish organizations, the Cadets and the bugle and drum corps parade down the street and onto 5th Avenue. Buses, cars and people stopped and clapped as the procession entered the spacious upper church for a choir sung mass, topped with the first priestly blessing and ice cream in the parish hall. We had 2 of these pious parades each summer Sunday for a couple or three weeks.

Today these First Mass Spectaculars are a rarity. In this day and age we do JUBILEES. We used to celebrate only the 50th and the 25th jubilees. But now we mark a 65th, a 60th, the 40th, and 35th as well. And why not? Why shouldn't we celebrate every year – every day – every minute of our lives as Redemptorists? Although first masses were about beginnings, Jubilees are not about endings. The jubilee prayer is not “Requiescat in pace.” It is “Jubilare Deo!” Give praise and thanks to God for the yesterdays, for the todays and for the tomorrows. We are still here and we are still Good News-ing to the poor. The Jubilarian paraphrases the words of Oliver Twist and says, “Please God, may I have some more?” The focus of Jubilee is three-dimensional. We look to the past, we cherish the present, we yearn for tomorrow.

At this Jubilee we celebrate God and people:

- the 6 confreres professed for 65 years,
- the 7 ordained for 60 years,
- the 2 professed for 60 years.

- the 5 ordained for 50 years,
- the 9 professed for 50 years,
- the 4 completing their 40th year of priesthood,
- the 5 completing their 35th,
- the 2 rounding out their 25th,
- and the 5 in their 25th year as Redemptorists.

That is quite an impressive line up of fidelity, sacrifice, service and joy. The names of 50 confreres are listed as Jubilarians in our 2007 Province Directory. That is quite a list of names and quite a chunk of time – 2210 years all together. So why not celebrate?

As the flower is in the seed, the jubilarian is in the newly professed and ordained. First masses and professions speak of beginnings. About being brand new. Opening day. Rookies. Promise, hope and visions. The green years and the honeymoon days.

Jubilees say, “to be continued.” Jubilees are the All Star Games – the mid summer classic. The break in mid season. The remembering time. The WOW-ing time. The reflecting time. Jubilees speak about the Grace of God. We celebrate what God has done in the years and lives of these 50 confreres and the thousands and thousands of people whose lives were graced by these men and their years.

A Jubilee is a time out, a half time, a seventh inning stretch. The game is not over yet. There is more to do. We must be good to the last out. So Jubilee tells us to do several things:

First, to DELIGHT in our years.

Secondly, to become more PRAYERFULLY aware.

Then, to celebrate FREEDOM – the freedom that comes with age, with being a veteran, with the satisfaction of a job well done.

Jubilee reminds us to CONTINUE on the journey – In the words of that great theologian Yogi Berra - “It ain’t over till it’s over.”

Jubilee says, “Look back. REMEMBER and tell the story.” Despite what Tony Soprano says, Remembering is the highest form of communication.

Look back and smile at all that was and say yes to all that will be.

And most of all, Jubilee tells us to GIVE THANKS.

Jubilee is like being inducted into the C.S.S.R. Cooperstown, the Redemptorist Hall of Fame, the Province Monument Park.

So we all smile with delight at the 60 and 65 years of service in the lives of men like Jim Lundy, Frank Sands, Ray McCarthy, Ed Foley, John Barry, Jim Mallen and Phil Cabasino. Quite a line up of legends! These men made better the lives of thousands in Brazil, in the Vice Province of Richmond, in the Dominican Republic, in North East, in Puerto Rico, in the military and on the streets of Boston.

We listen to the stories and the careers of men like the perennial Paraguayan, Bob Hopwood and the indestructible Joe Adamec, the prayerful Bobby Chessman, the counseling, teaching and joke telling Russ Abata, the parish priesting of Bobby Lennon, the cross carrying of Tom Loftus and the visions of Charlie Vermuellen, our brother from Belgium who became the doctor of Dominica, the Redemptorist of Roseau, the eagle of Eggleston.

We scan the names of those professed a half a century and we smile as we remember their pranks as seminarians, their boat trips to South America, their plane rides to Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, their bus rides to preach missions in the churches of the east coast or to teach in the classrooms of North East. They have names like Poux, Miller, Schmidt, O'Rourke, Blake, Vanyo, McGowan, Travers and Alfone.

The 40th ordained crowd lists some heavy hitters – men still caring in the Caribbean, still preaching in the conference room of Canandaigua, still fishing for people in the Archdiocese of Baltimore. You know their stories. They had names like Valles, Campbell, Harrison, Milton, Barrett and Gildea. The 35 year celebrants are a handsome and active Magnificent Seven of Gene Daigle, Charlie Donovan, Jim Gilmour, Frank Skelly, Tom Sullivan, Mike Sergi and Chris Walsh.

To most of us the silver crowd both professed and ordained look more like the newly ordained. Yet they have been around for 25 years. For a quarter century they have been writing books, shaping students, pastoring prisoners, and general practicing as parish priests, Gospel preachers and Provincial councilors. Their names and faces are young and familiar: the Konciks, the Morans, the Borowskis, the Bradleys, the Gaddys, the Mc Gillicuddys and the Tommy Kuhns.

Well done! can be said of and to each one of them. In their own special way they made the Redeemer known. They put a forgiving face on God. They made the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer famous. They OLPH-ed many a parish, a sick room, a desk, a prayer book and a heart.

Most of our jubilarians are priests who have been praised and celebrated in so many ways and at so many times. I would like to single out 2 Redemptorist jubilarians who are brothers and are both stationed here at St. John Neumann Residence. Br. Frank Alfone has been a Redemptorist for 50 years and Br. Thomas Kuhn has been one for 25 years. Both of these men are known and loved by all of us in the Province. Both have been behind the scenes workers and under the pulpit pray-ers. Both have made a career out of making Jesus look good and the rest of us even better.

Frank is a Jersey Boy. Tommy comes from North East. Frank came to us after single handedly winning World War II as a Merchant marine – so he tells us. He has no battle scars – just the tattoos to prove it. Tom joined us after beating the St. Mary’s Seminary basketball team countless times as a point guard for St. Gregory’s high school. God didn’t like that so he called Tommy to be a Redemptorist and since Tommy has been one of us, the Redemptorists have been unbeatable. Frank has always been a crusader – he has fought for life, for the poor, for the overlooked. Like Michelangelo himself Frank climbed a scaffold and painted the entire interior of St. Cecilia’s church. Tommy is the confrere who cared – he cared for the seminarians in Washington and managed the finances and upkeep of Holy Redeemer College there. His quiet, smiling charity has touched us all. He has picked us up at airports, warmed mission preachers cars on cold mornings before they drove off to a morning mass and has even done the most courageous Redemptoristic task of all – he is Br. John Bosco’s chauffer.

Both Frank and Tom have been felled by serious illnesses. That did not stop them. They both continue to trudge on carrying their crosses, accepting God’s will and inspiring the rest of us by continuing to serve and minister to even sicker and more handicapped confreres here in our infirmary.

We hear a lot these days about “assisted living.” Br. Frank Alfone and Br. Tom Kuhn together for a combined total of 75 years have assisted all of us in our living as Redemptorists. We thank them today. We congratulate them. We plead with them to carry on.

God has blessed our Province not with a few good men but with many good men. Today we thank the Lord for all these confreres - for their deeds, their accomplishments, their presence in the world, in the Province and in our lives. But Jubilee is only a rest stop – a pause to pray, to remember, to tell the stories and to celebrate God’s goodness to these men and to all of us. When jubilee ends, the story is to continue. After this prayerful and happy celebration, let us ask the Most Holy Redeemer and our perpetually helping Mother to continue to companion these men as they stroll the parish streets, as they enter the confessionals, as they mount the pulpits, as they approach the altars, and as they feed His and our people with the Word, with the Eucharist and with plentiful redemption.

The Lord’s work is not done yet and neither is theirs. Here’s to many, many more years.

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