

The Seventieth Anniversary of Ordination

Msgr. Vincent Foy

Introduction

Your Grace, Your Excellencies, Rev. Msgrs., Rev. Fathers, Rev. Brother, Rev. Sisters and dear relatives and friends:

I have waited 70 years for this day.

There have been a few changes in seventy years.

My ordination suit, donated by my Aunt Agnes and Uncle Will, cost \$29.95. It was made to order by Tip Top Tailors: there were two pairs of trousers and a vest. My ordination shoes, of fine English leather, given to me by my Aunt Elizabeth, cost \$6.00 - no GST.

Down Memory Lane

Permit me to take a brief journey down memory lane. Our 1939 ordination class was the last admitted to St. Augustine's Seminary, in 1933, under Archbishop Neil McNeil, who died in 1934.

In 1936, we were told that there were too many of us, and that unless some of us volunteered for other dioceses, some of the Toronto seminarians would be asked to leave. We all went, one by one, to the rector's office and volunteered to go wherever we were sent. Two of us were given to the new diocese of Nelson, BC, and two to Kingston Archdiocese. Three were loaned for three years to Western Canadian dioceses. Two of us were sent away for further studies.

I was almost ordained nearly 71 years ago. In September of 1938, Msgr. Brennan, the seminary rector, called me into his office. He said I would be ordained privately in two weeks. I was to tell no one, except my parents, who were permitted to visit me for a farewell. Archbishop McGuigan was going to take me to Rome, where I was to continue my fourth year of theology with my first year in post-graduate Canon Law. So for two weeks, I worked feverishly to prepare to offer the Latin Mass and packed my trunk and was ready to go.

The night before the date set for my ordination, I knocked on Msgr. Brennan's door. He invited me to come in and I said "Msgr., I believe I am to be

ordained tomorrow.” He looked surprised. “Oh” he said, “I forgot to tell you. It is all off. You can unpack. You are going to be ordained with the rest of the class next June. The Archbishop will take you to Rome next year.” No reason was given. It was years later when I was vice-chancellor and had access to the priests’ files, that I learned the reason. The Apostolic Delegate had refused to grant the necessary dispensation for insufficient age. In Sept of 1938, I had just turned 23.

So, I was ordained on June 3, 1939, one of a class of thirty-four.

The Class of 1939

I would like to pay tribute to the class of 1939, though there was no episcopal timber among us. In Fr. Murray Allen we had the brother of a bishop: Bishop Francis Allen, once pastor of this parish. I used to help him here by hearing children’s confessions.

Seven of our class belonged to the Scarborough Foreign Mission Society and served the Church in China, Japan, the Dominican Republic and other places. One, Fr. Francis Diemert, became the Superior General of the Society.

Fr. Jim Sheridan became head of Classics at St. Michael’s College. Fr. John Bouvier became a professor at St. Augustine’s Seminary.

Three of our number became Chancellors of their Dioceses: Msgr. Flynn in Nelson, BC, Msgr. Hubicz in Winnipeg and Msgr. Welsh in Kingston.

Four of the class of ‘39 served as military Chaplains. Fr. Hank McFadden of Ogdensburg was decorated for bravery in the North African campaign of World War II. Fr. Richard Ward, first chaplain in the Korean War, my closest friend, died a hero’s death trying to rescue nuns when a plane crashed into a convent near Ottawa in 1956.

Most of our class became parish priests. I served in the diocesan and provincial matrimonial tribunal courts for twenty-five years before becoming pastor of my natal parish of St. John’s in 1967 and later pastor of Holy Martyrs of Japan parish in Bradford and St. Patrick’s parish in Phelpston.

I salute all my dear classmates. They have all gone to God. They helped in their way to build up the Mystical Body of Christ.

The Priesthood

Now a word about the Priesthood... I can say with certitude that there was no identity crisis among priests of the class of 1939. We knew we were priests forever and that our model was Christ, the great high Priest. There were no dissenters. We knew that the teaching of the Church is the teaching of Christ. We knew the importance of devotion to Mary. Our class motto was “Nihil nobis nisi per Mariam” -- “Nothing comes to us except through Mary”.

When I left the Matrimonial Tribunal in 1966, I was given a beautiful watercolour painting of a chalice set in the middle of vines and grapes. That painting reminds me that the chalice is the symbol par excellence of the priesthood.

First of all there is the chalice of joy and consolation. There is an abiding inner joy in the priesthood associated with its many consolations: so many opportunities to bring grace through the sacraments and help in many ways. I think of the many thousands of times I have been able to say, in the place of Christ “I absolve you from your sins.”

There is the chalice of suffering. Every priest must spend his hour in the Garden of Gethsemani and join Simon of Cyrene in helping Christ carry the cross to Calvary. But God has graciously put a time limit on all earthly sickness and sorrow.

Above all there is the chalice of sacrifice, the greatest privilege in the world; that of standing in the place of Christ to offer the sacrifice of the Mass: to glorify God and Our Blessed Mother and all the angels and saints, for the souls of the departed and for the living.

Permit me to do a little boasting. I have been privileged to offer Mass in numerous places, signifying the Catholicity of the Church: at the Church of the Annunciation in Nazareth, at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, at the Shrine of Our Lady of Loreto, at the tomb of St. Francis of Assisi, beside the body of Pope St. Pius X when it was brought to St. Mark's in Venice in April of 1959, at the great cathedral of St. Stephen in Vienna, in a village Church in Hungary during the Russian occupation, at the Shrine of St. Bernadette of Lourdes, beside the body of St. John Vianney at Ars using his chalice, in the ancient Cathedral of Cologne, in Westminster Cathedral in London, the private chapel of Cardinal Newman in Birmingham using his chalice, in the pro-cathedral in Dublin, the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico and many other places.

I was privileged to be a Eucharistic minister at many papal Masses, including the funeral of Pope Paul VI, the inaugural Mass of Pope John Paul I, his funeral, and the inaugural Mass of Pope John Paul II. All of this points to the centrality of the Eucharist in a priest's life, and that it is the priesthood that we are honoring today.

Gratitude

I cannot let this occasion pass without an expression of thanks and gratitude. First, I am grateful to God. Christ said: "You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you". This is a great mystery, the choosing of such a weak instrument.

I am grateful to my dear departed parents for their many sacrifices on my behalf. I am grateful to my brothers and sisters and all my relatives and in-laws. I single out my dear sister Doreen, a registered nurse, an angel of love and mercy to all the family, and my sister Shirley, here today. I thank my sister-in-law, Pauline Foy, for countless acts of help.

Sincerest thanks to Archbishop Collins, to Bishop Lacey and to this parish, who graciously hosted this occasion.

I thank and all who have helped with this celebration.

I thank the many priests who inspired me and my priest-friends who have been my help and companions. I thank my teachers, especially the De La Salle brothers who taught me in high school and who are taking care of me in the old age.

There are many here to whom I owe much. I wish to single out many outstanding pro-life workers who are here. What a great and noble and difficult work it is, trying to restore in Canada the Culture of Life.

Once when I was walking along a road near Rome, I met a small group of children. As they passed, they raised their arms and said "Salve!" -- "Hail!". I thought to myself: children were using that same beautiful greeting two thousand years ago. In similar vein, I say to you "Ave! Salve! Vale!" -- "Hail and farewell and may it go well with you!"

May God bless you! Amen.