

Visited by Grace



St. Viateur Residence & Centre Champagneur

We recently visited with a dear friend who was the celebrant of the English Mass at Our Lady's Sanctuary for the last dozen or so years. Father has not been well and is currently receiving care at Centre Champagneur, the St. Viateur infirmary in Joliette, Quebec. In the course of our visit we were graciously invited to attend Mass and stay for lunch, which of course we were honoured to accept. While helping Father, we make our

way into the hallway, joining the slow-moving throng of people - wheelchairs, attendants, those pushing walkers and those still able to move on their own. We are struck by the prayerfulness of it all; the solemnity each person brings with them in their procession towards the chapel.

My soul rejoices in God my Savior! This sentiment seems to emanate from these men and fill the chapel as they gather for the cele-

bration of Mass. In their sufferings, and in some their sufferings are quite evident, there exists a dignity, a grace, a peace that is enjoyed by those who have learned to rely completely on the Lord.

The clerics in wheelchairs are brought in by their fellow clerics. Those who are able to walk shuffle in slowly and carefully. A brother, who is so bent over he can barely see a few steps ahead, leads a blind brother and they come to the chapel, a few steps at a time, and take their seats together. For the most part, these men appear small and shrunken in the oversized cushioned chairs, yet they possess such an elegance. As we wait for Mass to begin, we look around the chapel and wonder about these frail men who seem to have entered into prayer as easily as one takes another breath. With the opening prayer of the Mass, a strong and deep response rises from the lips of this frail group and the strength of their response belies their seemingly delicate state. In a sense they come alive as a community as

they enter together into the liturgy. The Mass is a holy and wonderful experience made more so by sharing it with these special men. When the liturgy ends, the prayerfulness does not dissipate. There is a lingering; the Sacred remains. There is no rush to leave, the chapel empties slowly, while the Blessed Sacrament is brought to those unable to leave their beds.

At lunch we meet some of these men and listen to their stories. It is not long before we realize that we are in the midst of heroic virtue, of entire lives poured out in humility and service to God's people. Many years ago when these men were young, they came from villages and towns and offered themselves and what poor gifts they could in response to the Lord's call. They

entered the Order and most received their formation and higher education at CSV schools and colleges. They went on to become teachers, administrators, parish priests and missionaries. Often facing hostility, danger, distrust and misunderstanding, these



S. Viator by Gaétan Therrien
photo de René Breton, c.s.v.

clerics founded and managed orphanages, schools, colleges and seminaries around the world. In so doing, they shared the hunger, poverty and disease of those they had come to serve. Those who became parish priests endured the hardship and exhaustion that often comes when serving five or six rural parishes. They did this always and everywhere for the love of the Gospel. In picking up their cross to follow Jesus so faithfully, each of these clerics must have had their own struggles, their own crises, their own difficulties to face. Many spent the greatest part of their lives in foreign lands, away from home, away from family, away from fellow CSVs. None of these men considers anything they have done as special or extraordinary - they simply answered the Lord's call; this is where it has taken them and that is enough for them. These men just as much enjoy recalling the antics and jokes they played on each other in seminary some fifty years ago as anything else. Yet they don't dwell on the past. They very much live in the present. These truly remarkable men have given all and they have not stopped giving. They have witnessed the passing of confreres (whom they remember in prayer). Many have accepted that this infirmary may become the place from which heaven beckons them. Even now, it seems that many

have only their suffering and their poverty to offer, for some are not even able to pray. Yet there is a peace, a tranquility, a faith that one can almost touch.

After lunch many return to their rooms to read or pray or rest and a hush descends over the hallways. It is time for us to say good bye to Father. As we take our leave, we are left with this thought: for our hearts to be inspired and to see God in the world, we need not always be awed by a beautiful sunset or stand on the top of a mountain to see a glorious morning or even witness a miracle; we need not always hear a grand choir sing an inspiring Hallelujah chorus. Sometimes we can hear God's love within the silence of the quiet corridors of a clerics' infirmary residence.

Heavenly Father,
we thank you for all the holy priests
who have passed through our lives
and blessed us with your grace.

Accept our prayer of gratitude
and continue
to bless these holy priests
and brothers.

We ask this in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

Father Gaston Palardy, CSV, went to his heavenly reward on April 7, 2011. By the grace of God, may he rest in peace. Amen.

Peter and Linda Krushelnyski