

Keynote Sermon for Diocesan Ultreya

It's been a long time since my three-day adventure into the essence of Christianity. Surprisingly, that was thirty-five years ago. I don't remember many of the rollos. I remember I could have given a better sacrament talk than the priest who repeated throughout his presentation that sacraments were not magic. What I do remember most is the talk at my table of St. James after each rollo. I remember the feeling of coming together as a team of friends. I remember the fun and the bonding. I remember enjoying being a Christian.

Being a parish priest can become merely a responsibility. I need to be precise in what I say from the pulpit. One slip and someone can be hurt. Or another might take something the wrong way and get the point wrong. Meeting people can, at times, be sensitive and, therefore, dangerous. One has to be very careful.

But, not on my Cursillo weekend! We were becoming brothers in Christ. We could make gaffs and be immediately forgiven. We could be laughed at and not get our feelings hurt. I was experiencing a taste of heaven. I also found out this is what life on earth was meant to be. If only everyone could have that same experience. Now, more than ever, I have that same desire.

That desire is more than getting people to enjoy a weekend experience. My desire has developed. Now, I want to see the world changed. It needs changing. After 42 years as a priest, I have looked up and seen that the world is not the same as it was when I received the Sacrament of Holy Orders. It is more competitive than I remember it was. It is far more secular than it was. After a couple of wars without victories, my beloved country has become disillusioned and angry. At the same time people are being exposed to billions of dollars of advertizing every minute of every day tempting them to buy products they can hardly afford. No wonder the number of families deep into debt is rising astronomically.

So, at the tender age of 70, I have made a decision to retire from being a pastor. I like to think I did pretty well in that office. But, caring for a parish is a 24 hour a day job. One can do little else. Only mothering takes more intense

constant attention. However, at a certain age, nature imposes a curfew on having babies and the joy of helping your children raise the best grandchildren in the world begins.

Well, I have chosen to leave parish ministry so I can support the effort to change the world. There is a great deal of poverty and ignorance throughout our planet. I want to support our missionaries and growing dioceses around the world. I've already been there and witnessed dire need and many great people working heroically for the sake of the gospel and the wonderful people to whom they're preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. I want to help them as best I can to do their job.

But, I still want to do my part to address the spiritual problems facing our country. There are two programs that I want to invest most of my time. One is Marriage Encounter. The other is Cursillo.

These organizations have much in common. Both were founded in Spain. Both are based on the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola. Both generate a great deal of joy. Both lead people to a deep experience of Christ. Both are the antidote for what Americans are dying from. However, both have the same history here. Both had fantastic popularity in the late sixties and 70's. Both are struggling at the present to attract new people. This latter fact tells me both have the same enemy – desire for material things which leads to a lack of time to invest in the spiritual life.

Cursillo is one answer to the world's consumerism. If people could experience our joy, the world would be better. If people could know Christ as we have come to know him, the world would be better. If people could have friends as we do, the world would be better. Then, why do people not experience our joy or know Christ or have such friends? The answer may well be because they have not been asked enough times.

The modern world asks people to buy things constantly. They do not take 'no' for an answer. It was a rule some years ago and might still be so that a TV ad has to be seen four times in a week to be effective. Then, an advertiser would have to calculate how many times and on what programs the ad should be placed to insure that the required number of viewers would see the commercial four times

that week. They pay heavily to make that happen. Besides, their ads have to be more seductive than their competition. Obviously, they pay the money and win over customers who have to work another job to pay for the products which are not cheap. They soon find they have sold their souls for stuff that rapidly grows old and outdated. And they can't spend a weekend away with the Lord because they need extra hours of work to pay for the stuff they will shortly scrap.

I want to spend my time helping people to get out of that syndrome of spending-going into debt-working harder and longer- and missing out on life. At the end they lose out on family and God. I want to recruit you to help me. I want to talk you into making friends and bringing them to Christ. I want to be a little part of the process that will enkindle a new revival within the Church. I would settle if we could bring back the same enthusiasm Cursillo had in the 70's.

Jesus has told us he is Love. He has commanded us to love. I take that to be a friend to others. What I seek is that his commandment be lived – first by you and then by the friends you bring to Christ. I hope that you become excited by your relationship in Christ. The essential factor in that is to welcome Christ at Mass and receive him permanently in a Holy Communion.

Recently, a priest reminded me that the first words of Jesus, in the synoptic Gospels, are, "Come and see" in answer to the question where he was staying. The last words of Jesus come as he is ascending to heaven, "Go and announce the good news..." Let us come to Jesus in Eucharist. And then, let us go and announce the good news.