

Ordination, Barry Larkin.

When I was in seminary I remember reading a little book by a man called Alvin Toffler, the book was called 'Future Shock.' I don't remember too many books I read in seminary but I have always remembered this one.

One of the Chapters was entitled 'The Death of Permanence.' Toffler predicted that the future would shock us because it would be characterised by 'transience, disposability, novelty and mobility.'

Remember this was the 1960's but I think that Toffler got it exactly right and since he made his prediction future shock has become present reality. The very air we breathe today is charged with these qualities, transience, disposability, novelty, and mobility.

The challenge for believers, and that includes priests, is to live our lives in the most rapidly moving and complex environment that has ever existed on this planet, to live and believe in an environment which is increasingly defined and shaped by transience, disposability, novelty, and mobility.

Sometimes we priests have a hard time accepting the death of permanence, we were brought up seeing it as a virtue and we don't like to think about it not being there anymore.

We think nostalgically of the good old days, the so called age of faith, forgetting that our role is not to canonise the past but to consecrate the future. To assure people in the words of Lamentations that 'the favours of the Lord are not all past.....every morning they are renewed.'

Otherwise we run the risk of coming across like the priest in the Yeats poem The Ballad of Father Gilligan 'the old priest Peter Gilligan was weary night and day.'

In a world in which perception is reality and the medium is the message, this does the Good News no favours.

At every Mass we proclaim that we 'wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.' Joyful hope is not something we throw in when we are having a good day, it's part of the package, part of the Gospel, part of the Good News that we are ordained to bring.

Some time ago a woman was giving business advice on the radio and she said 'don't open a shop if you don't like people,' you could equally say 'don't become a priest if you don't like people!'

Recently I came across an article by Fr Ron Rolheiser in which he was reflecting on the next generation of priests, men like Barry who will live out their priesthood in the 21st century.

“ They will be ordained twice ” he said. “ First they will be ordained by their bishop, then they will be ordained by their people.”

What did he mean by that? I think every priest here today will understand what Fr Rolheiser meant when he said “ then they will be ordained by their people.”

When we think about it we priests know that to a large extent the people we serve set our agenda-----and in doing so they ordain us again!

Rolheiser spells out what it means to him-----listening attentively to people’s hopes and fears, and responding in a spirit of faith and hope, which is the authentic Catholic tradition.

Failure to do this brings to mind the story of Groucho Marx and the priest. It seems that the priest was walking along a busy boulevard in Los Angeles one day when he thought he recognised the great comedian.

He tentatively approached him ; “ pardon me, but aren’t you Groucho Marx? ” Yes I am Father” the comedian replied raising and lowering his eyebrows and tipping his cigar in his trade mark fashion.

“ Well ” said the priest “ I just wanted to thank you for all the joy and laughter you have brought into this world.”

Groucho is supposed to have replied “ and I would like to thank you Father for all the joy and laughter you have taken out of this world.”

The Word became flesh and lived among us. We mustn’t confine this proclamation to Christmas. That’s why Patrick Kavanagh’s line ‘ God is in the bits and pieces of life....a laugh....a kiss....and sometimes tears ’ is so rich in meaning, so incarnational, so true.

The job of the priest is to find God in the bits and pieces of life, often in the broken bits and pieces, and then as Brien Friel would say, to translate the experience for himself and his people.

To do this effectively we must live our priesthood in a spirit of joy and hope and look with expectation to the future. As Tony Blair said in another context, we must believe as much in the future as we do in the past.

Not everybody will understand what's happening here today.

Some of the people at Bethany didn't understand what was happening there either. ' Why this waste.....this ointment could have been sold.....the money given to the poor '.....this wasn't the sensible thing to do.

Only in the words of Christ does Bethany make sense ' what she has done for me is a good work.....she has done what was in her power to do."

A vocation is an affair of the heart and whenever we choose to follow our hearts, the anointing at Bethany happens again. It is happening here today.

Some time ago I came across a piece about a priest celebrating his Silver Jubilee. Reflecting on his years as a priest he said ' the last twenty five years have been made up of joys and sorrows.

When I look back now, I see them as years filled with the magic of chasing God, sometimes catching him, and then rushing back to tell you."

That's a pretty good description of what a priest does, that's what his life is about, chasing God, sometimes catching him.....not always.....sometimes the chase is in vain.....sometimes God seems to hide.

But when he does catch him he rushes back to tell his people, to share the magic, to talk about the experience.

That's the calling of the priest in every time and place. It is the calling that Barry Larkin is accepting today. This is your first ordination Barry.....the second one will take a little longer, it will go on for the rest of your life!

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.