

10th Anniversary Eucharistic Celebration –

Homily by Rev. Monsignor Stephen Jensen

The Jesuit missionaries, who were the first to bring the faith to this part of the world in the 17th century, were in a habit of writing long letters back home to tell about their adventures. Those letters were published in Europe and read widely, and we can still read them today. They are called collectively *The Jesuit Relations*. Those letters tell us about their activities, but even more tell us about the men who came on that mission to Canada, to New France as it was known. The letters really give us a portrait of them as Saints.

One of the letters was written in 1639, and from the pen of Jean de Brebeuf. It reads: “We have sometimes wondered whether we could hope for conversion of the country without shedding of blood”. Is there any hope of conversion without sacrifice? Well, the answer lies in the nature of this change that we call conversion. It’s not an external thing, not just a change in a person’s outward appearance or his routine. Conversion is really a complete revolution that penetrates to the very core of the person. It’s a revolution in perspective: the way we see things, the people around us, re-advance in our lives. It’s a change in our thinking, how we respond to what we see. It’s a change in our attitudes, that shape the way we see, and the way we respond. Conversion is a change in priorities, a change in how we consider something important, and other things not so important. And finally conversion is something that is visible to others, something that makes the way we speak and act noticeably different. And this work of conversion is an individual thing, but also a communal thing. It starts with individual, with you and with me, but it is meant to transform the people and the world around us, beginning with our partner in marriage, our family, going out to our parish, and through the community of the parish. Conversion is



meant to have an impact on the city, the country, and the whole world.

We could say that conversion is really why a parish exists - to enable people to undergo that total revolution in thinking, perspective, priority and activity. And it’s meant to be something that transforms a community of individuals, making a parish different, and noticeably different to those who observe it from outside. The question Jean de Brebeuf put in his letter is a good one for us to consider: “Can we hope for conversion without shedding of blood? Can we experience this transformation without dying?” The answer is “No”.

Every page of the church history and the lives of the Canadian Martyrs teach us that lesson. Conversion is all about dying, so that something new can take hold. Conversion is about leaving behind our way of thinking, acting and judging, and the beginning to see, think, judge, speak, and act as a new person. Conversion always means a death so that a resurrection can take place. For some members of the faith community, it will mean physical death at a moment, like the Canadian Martyrs experienced. But for all of us, it will involve dying in other ways, that are even more important. In the lives of the martyrs, that dying that was not physical was the most important way that they died as well. This kind of conversion and this experience of dying and rising is possible because Someone has experienced that before us, Someone has gone ahead of us on this role. Because He has preceded us, we have the possibility, and the strength, and the invitation to follow. Jesus is the one who is a great pioneer on this path of revolution, this path of conversion. He didn’t need it on his own life, but in his mercy, he took the human life like ours, and lived it perfectly and fully to show us a pattern for living. In every moment of his life, Jesus was giving us an example of what the journey of conversion involves, dying to oneself, rising to a life with God, and for

God, and for others.

Jesus answered the question that Jean de Brebeuf asked, “Is it possible for conversion to happen without shedding of blood?” Jesus took a life like ours, so that he could lay it down, so that he could offer his life’s blood. Jesus’ life is a pattern of sacrifice, of making my life a gift, given to God and given to others. In every moment of his life, Jesus was giving himself. He was making his life a sacrifice, and He completed that on the cross when He gave his life’s blood literally for us. By that sacrifice and by that gift, the Lord has healed all the ways that we don’t make ourselves a gift to God and to others. Jesus’ sacrifice saves us and makes conversion possible.

Reading from God’s word are about that today. In the first reading, St. John describes his vision of Heaven, where he sees the saints gathered, and the angel tells him that these are the ones who have come out of the great ordeal. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. The shedding of the Lord’s blood has made our forgiveness and our purification possible. St. John goes on and hears that those who have washed themselves in the blood of Christ, the Lamb, are called to live like him, to be his followers. John says the Lamb will guide them to the springs of water, the waters of life. Jesus guides us in the way of sacrifice, in the way of making our lives, our words, our actions a gift, of sacrifice to God.

Most of us are not going to be called to martyrdom of blood, but every person in the Church is called to martyrdom by the way we live, by making everything we do a sacrifice and a gift to God. And because the Lord has gone before us on the way, we have the strength to do that, and the lives of the Canadian Martyrs are the perfect illustration of that truth.

In the second reading today, St. Paul says we have this treasure of Christian life **in clay vessels**. We are weak, so that it may be clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God. We don’t walk this way of conversion; we don’t make ourselves a gift by our own strength or ability. It’s the grace of God working in us; and when we

read the letters of the Canadian Martyrs, the *Jesuit Relations*, the truth about that shines through in their words. It’s clear that they, first of all, had a deep and life-giving commitment and relationship to Jesus. They knew him and were known by him, and by that knowledge and that intimate friendship they had strength to make themselves gifts. When we read those letters, it’s also clear their lives with Christ affected their lives with each other.

The Jesuits were remarkable for the generous kind of love they showed to each other. Always giving credit to one another, always forgetting themselves and pointing to each other as the holiness and the goodness of God and work in their mission. And finally in those *Jesuit Relations*, what shines through clearly is the support that they needed

and lived their life loving Christ and each other, and that was a serious and ever deepening life of prayers. Conversion are all those things. It is the ingredient



of love for God and neighbour, nourished in a prayer life that makes us martyrs, a Greek word that simply means “witness”. Those signs of the Christian life, a love of God, a willingness to live and grow, and love with each other, all found on prayers are the source of Christian life, and the source of every parish life too. Those are the ingredients and the path of conversion that changes us, and through us changes the world. We are part of the long history of faith, witness and conversion.

It’s our privilege to claim the Canadian Martyrs as our models in this parish, so we ask their prayers that we may follow the way that Jesus gives us through them, by imitating them with the gift of conversion, and make ourselves a gift to God.