

*Grant that we, who call on you in our need,
may at your prompting discern what is right,
and by your guidance do it.*

From the Collect for the Tenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Dear Brothers, Associates, and former members, let me begin this afternoon by expressing my congratulations and a hearty *proficiat* to those celebrating their jubilee year: Brothers Damian, Philip White, Nivard and Sylveer Strobbe who celebrate 70 years; Brothers Gerard DeBeuckelaere and Leo Gillis who celebrate 60 years; and our Golden Jubilarian class of Brothers Bob Arrowsmith, Brian Davis, Joseph Glebas, Paul Murray and Leonard Wojtankwski.

As I was preparing this reflection, praying with the Scripture readings for this 10th Sunday in Ordinary Time and thinking about this afternoon's celebration, the words of the opening prayer for today's Liturgy provided the key that unlocked for me the connection between today's Scripture and the jubilees we celebrate:

O God, from whom all good things come, grant that we, who call on you in our need, may at your prompting discern what is right, and by your guidance do it.

When we take today's first reading, as well as today's Gospel, we see the principal actors in those readings – Elijah at the house of the widow in Zarephath and Jesus outside the gates of the city of Nain – acting with compassion, prompted by the need they discerned in the events unfolding before them. We see this, too, in the reading from Galatians where Paul recounts how God, who had set him apart in his mother's womb, called him from his former way of life and was pleased to reveal his Son to him, prompting him to go to Damascus for a three year period of discernment where he came to know the Risen Jesus.

It is God who prompts, who calls, who guides – I'm sure that is the experience for those of you who mark this significant milestone in your life. It is God who called you from your mother's womb, who prompted you; and you have responded. Certainly, as our *Fundamental Principles* remind us, at times you "discover(ed) that God's ways are not your ways, and God's thoughts are not your thoughts" but like our Founder, I'm sure in your response you repeated that simple prayer: "O Lord, I can not understand your ways, but I must adore them."

Most likely, none of you could have predicted the road that you would have walked in your life as a Xaverian, but knowing all of you and knowing something about those roads you've walked and the places those roads have led you, I can say with confidence that prompted by God's Spirit, you did act with compassion as you tried to be God's "healing touch of love through word and deed, to those you encountered in your life of evangelical service."

I would bet that at times you felt very much like Elijah from that first reading, who wasn't necessarily welcomed with open arms by the widow in Zarephath. No doubt, you had one or two mothers who questioned what you were trying to do with their son, or tried to put the blame on

you for their son or daughter's lack of progress. And no doubt, like Elijah, you probably had a version of his conversation with God – something like, "O God, don't let me screw this up and prove that mother right." In the end, did you act with compassion? And, if for whatever reason you were not able to do so, where you able to experience God's mercy and forgiveness and, like St. Paul, be called into a deeper relationship with the Risen Christ?

Brothers, in addition to reflecting on today's Scripture in light of our jubilee celebration, I've also spent much time reflecting on today's Scripture in light of where we are today as a Congregation of Religious Brothers and as a Church. As some of you know, after my meetings in Rome, I spent some days on vacation where I began reading a pretty tough study of the sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic Church, particularly in Ireland and the United States. The author, a clinician and researcher who has spent almost 25 years working with victims and perpetrators of abuse, sets out in the book to look at the systemic issues that surround the abuse of young people and vulnerable adults. Without getting too deeply or too darkly into all of her analysis, I believe she does raise some good and serious questions about the ecclesiology of our church today, about the theology of priesthood and religious life, and about the untenable situation she believes the institutional church places on ordained men and vowed religious men today – are the supports really there to help us live faithfully today, or do we have to navigate our way on our own without the real support systems in place to help us to be faithful to our way of life? As I read through some of the pre-chapter reflections and concerns, I hear a call for more connectedness, not just with leadership, but among us as Brothers. How does this deepened sense of connectedness help us to be more aware of our own intimacy needs – needs that are not just the needs of young people, but of all of us, no matter our age or physical health? And being aware of our needs, how do we address them in healthy and appropriate ways? How do we mentor younger men in the life or even be of support to our Brothers at other periods of transition in their lives?

Let me go back to today's Gospel – to the image of "the man who had died (and) was being carried out, the only son of his mother and she was a widow." It is a pretty sad scene, the widow who had no means of support except her son, is now bringing him to be buried. I imagine that she is doing this in all humility, not looking for a miracle, not looking for how she'll manage her future; she humbly walks in the funeral procession, accepting what is, not expecting anything else. It is here, on this road, in her humbled state that she encounters Jesus, that he takes pity on her, touches her son's coffin and says, "Young man, I tell you arise!"

For me, I wonder if that is an image of our church today, or at least of the institutional trappings of it. Can we have the humility of the widow, who doesn't know how she will sustain herself, but who in all humility walks to bury the one she has loved who has died? On this road, in all humility, because we don't have the answer to what will happen tomorrow, can we encounter Jesus and feel his pity and compassion?

Maybe there are signs that this is what is happening in the church today. Who of us could have imagined a year ago that Pope Benedict, in all humility, would have said a version of "I've done what I can, and for the good of the church and the Gospel of Jesus I need to step aside"? Who of us could have imagined the image of a simple, humble successor of Peter stepping out on the

loggia of St. Peter's Basilica and saying, "Before I can bless you, you must first bless me."? Can we see in these times, that God's Spirit continues to call us to new life?

As we prepare for Chapter, can we in all humility say, "we need to discover new ways of being Brother to each other and to our world?" Can we admit that certain ways that we've been Brother have died –without judging them, romanticizing them, or grasping at them? In that humble state, can we encounter Jesus? Or as our Founder said in his conversion experience, can we turn toward God, fall in love with God, and vow to place ourselves in God's service?

My hope and prayer – said with all humility and in full knowledge of my own faults and weaknesses, my failures – is that we, individually and as a community, can encounter Jesus on the road we find ourselves on today, that we can feel him touch the coffin that closes in on us and hear him call to us, "Young man, (Brother,) I tell you arise!" And, if it is God's will and we act in obedience to that will, I hope and pray that we can begin to develop the practices we need to incorporate into our lives today and in the future that will allow us to be more fully "brother" to one another and to "Go, then, to all peoples everywhere, and make them my disciples."

After a moment of quiet, our Brothers celebrating their jubilee will be asked to step forward to renew their profession. In the revised rite of profession that we have been using, the scrutinies, or questioning, are based on our **Fundamental Principles** - the Xaverian Way of Life. May this renewal of profession symbolizes for us, not simply a commemoration of a profession that was made 48, 58, or 68 years ago, but may it symbolize our communal response and aspiration to Jesus' summons to us to arise and to live more deeply and more fully the charism of Theodore James Ryken and the Xaverian Brothers.

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Brother Lawrence Harvey, CFX
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