

Body and Blood of Christ– Homily by Fr. Dan Donovan (June 10, 2012) –
(Reflecting about the priesthood in general and his own experience in his 50th anniversary year as a priest)

Fifty years ago, on **June 2nd, 1962**, I was ordained a priest for the archdiocese of Toronto. In recognition of the occasion, I would like to share a few thoughts with you on the **priesthood** and on **my own experience** of being a priest.

Like other forms of the ordained ministry, the **priesthood** in the Catholic tradition is inseparable from the life of the church. A person becomes a priest because he believes that he has **received a vocation** to this way of life, a vocation which he sees as coming ultimately from God but which is mediated to him through family and church, as well as through his own aptitudes and talents, interests and experiences.

In speaking once to a group of the faithful, St. Augustine said: “For you I am a priest, with you I am a Christian.” A priest begins and ends by **sharing the same faith and hope** as all Christians and by trying like them to live in accordance with the teaching and example of Jesus. Becoming a priest means accepting a ministry, a service, a responsibility within the community of faith. Although that ministry can take different forms and involve a variety of responsibilities, at its heart are **preaching and teaching** based on the Scriptures and presiding at the liturgy, especially the **liturgy of the eucharist**. Fifty years ago the Catholic Church and Canadian society were both very different from what they are now. It has been somewhat of an adventure to have lived through all the changes that have taken place in both.

I was born and **raised in Toronto** and completed my initial university studies here at St. Michael’s College. After four years of theology in Quebec City, I was ordained and worked for a year in a parish in Toronto.

Because of my particular abilities and interests, I was sent by Archbishop Pocock to **Europe for graduate studies** in scripture and in theology. The four years I spent there, two in

Rome and two in Münster, Germany, were for me enormously enriching and stimulating and, in the end, life-determining. I was in Rome during two of the four sessions of the **Second Vatican Council** and was able to take in something of the intensity of the debates and of the hopes which they were generating. In Germany I studied with some of the most outstanding Catholic theologians of the time including the great German Jesuit, **Karl Rahner**, and **Joseph Ratzinger**, the present pope.

My **time in Europe** broadened and deepened my understanding and appreciation not only of theology but also of history and culture, and of the arts, especially the **visual arts**.

I have been living and teaching at St. Michael's College for the **last 41 years**. My going there was an example of the old cliché about one door closing and another opening. I have always regarded it as one of the great graces of my life. St. Michael's rapidly became the focus of my energy and commitment. In addition to teaching and to being involved in various ways in the broader life of the College, I have been able to bring together, donate and install in its various buildings a substantial collection of **contemporary Canadian art**. Many of the individual works in the collection are marked by a strong spiritual quality.

Both John Paul II and Benedict XVI have both recalled the considerable contribution of **art to the history of the church** and have underlined the points of contact between serious art and the questions and attitudes that are found at the heart of all religion. They have called for a renewed dialogue between the **church and contemporary art**. It is something to which, in a small way, I have been able to contribute.

Every priest suffers from the inevitable distance between his own spiritual and moral life and the great realities and ideals about which he teaches and preaches and which he celebrates in the sacraments. The spate of recent revelations of **priests abusing children** has been for me and, I am sure, for many priests a source of deep sorrow and shame. Their actions give a whole new

meaning to the phrase “**the sinful church.**” The failures of such priests and the related failures of some church leaders to deal decisively with them, fill us, on the one hand, with a sense of humility and, on the other, with a hope and a prayer and with a passionate desire that everything possible will be done to avoid such evil in the future.

Before everything else, I and all **priests remain human beings** with many of the joys and hopes, the pains and sorrows, that are a part of every human life. Being a **celibate** is not always easy. We don't experience the gifts and challenges of marriage and family life, nor are we able to see ourselves living on in some way in the lives of our children and grandchildren. For me, that, to some degree, has been compensated by the **goodness and kindness of friends**. Although they come from different backgrounds, they have all been a source of the kind of warmth and love of which every human being stands in need.

The most important **explicitly priestly act** in which I participate on a regular basis is **the Mass**. The study of Scripture that is involved in **preparing a homily** has been and continues to be a source of real spiritual nourishment. When I preach, I preach first of all to myself.

The eucharistic liturgy, for its part, has been in my life the great teacher of what it means to come into the presence of God and to be caught up in an attitude of worship and praise. The making memory of the **self-giving love of Jesus** at the heart of the celebration has been an unending source of strength and inspiration as I have tried and try to live out my human existence as **a Christian and as a priest**.