

Celebration of the 40th Anniversary of Priesthood of Father Charles Brandt, erm.

February 4, 2007 – St. Patrick's Parish, Campbell River

by Joan Ripley

In an outpouring of love and appreciation, over two hundred people gathered to honour Father Charles Brandt for the celebration of the 40th anniversary of his ordination to the Priesthood and the hermit life. Bishop Richard Gagnon concelebrated the Holy Mass at St. Patrick's Parish in Campbell River on Sunday, February 4th with Pastor Fr. Bill McDonald, Fr. Charles and Fr. Joseph Killoran of the Comox Valley. A reception followed in the parish hall.

"This is a time of thanksgiving," said Bishop Gagnon at the beginning, "for the years of Fr. Charles' devoted service and also for the recent favourable outcome of the lawsuit in the American courts" which he discussed later in the Mass.

After the homily the Bishop prayed over Father Charles and imparted a hermit blessing to him for living out the hermit life now, in the past and in the future. For the hermit priest it was the highlight of the event, the validation of his unique vocation and he was visibly moved as the Bishop enfolded him in a warm embrace.

In his homily the Bishop said, "Father, you have been called not only to be a priest but God has also called you to live a life of solitude so you can live more intensely the spiritual life, to live in silence in a world so loud and busy, in silence where we come into contact with God in our life." He added, "So my people, today, even in the absence of silence, the call of God to be a witness to the Good News is for all of us."

"Father Charles, our prayers are with you today, and we thank God for your witness within the Diocese of Victoria and for saying 'yes' to God."

At the reception Fr. Charles responded by expressing his appreciation for the wonderful homily giving a special place to the contemplative life. He also thanked Judy Campbell and Susan Brummitt who did much of the organizing as well as the many people who have helped him over the years, particularly the Knights of Columbus who helped him move his hermitage from the T'solum to the Oyster River.

Father also spoke about his experience as a Trappist monk living under the Rule of St. Benedict and noted that in the Rule a monk is defined as someone who truly seeks God. "We are all doing that," he said.



Bishop Richard Gagnon imparts a hermit blessing on Fr. Charles Brandt

Father went on to discuss global warming and the recent meeting of scientists in Paris. "There is no doubt in anyone's mind about global warming," he said, "and this warming is due to human beings and their actions, not to some cyclic movement of seasons or earth or stars, but largely to the burning of fossil fuels, agriculture and deforestation. The warming is having catastrophic effects on the earth, people, plants, animals, on everything. We have to change from being a society having a disruptive effect on the earth to one having a benign effect. We have to fall in love with the earth and the universe as we will only save that which we love. And we will only love what we think is sacred. Only the sense of the sacred will save us."

Noting that the parish hall where the reception was held is built onto the old school of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Father shared his great devotion to her which goes back to a pilgrimage he made to Guadalupe in the early 1960s when he was aware of receiving great graces. The image of Our Lady of Guadalupe is on the front of the invitations he sent out and was also on the invitations to his ordination forty years ago. According to Judy Campbell, Fr. Charles wanted the invitations to be sacramentals for his family and friends who could not attend. In addition to members of the parish, many of those who attended were non-Catholic friends and associates of Fr. Charles.

He said recently he was reading from the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, where he said that everyone wants to leave behind something that lasts and what lasts is not money or buildings or books because after time they all disappear. The only thing that lasts unto eternity is the human soul and the fruit that lasts is what is planted in the human soul. "Therefore, let us pray to the Lord so that he helps us to bear fruit, a fruit that lasts. Only this way can the earth be transformed from a valley of tears into the Garden of God."

Father concluded by saying, "Thank you for your love, your understanding, and for touching my heart". Led by Bishop Gagnon, everyone responded with a standing ovation.

MC Pieter Koleman mentioned the invitations Father sent out and the quote inside them on meditation by Thomas Merton called "Entirely to God". Noting that the passage concludes with the words, "But the gate of heaven is everywhere", Koleman said, "Fr. Charles shows us that the gate of heaven is everywhere".

Speaking on behalf of St. Patrick's parish, Judy Campbell said, "I want to thank you, Fr. Charles, for sharing your love with us. I hope you realize what you are to us. We love you and we want your presence with us for many years. We need your gentle guidance."

Other speakers included Dr. Luis Carvahlo and Ted Fortosky. Doug Phyll showed a silent video of Fr. Charles' life prepared by Dr. Carvahlo. The luncheon was prepared by the women of St. Patrick's CWL.

Dr. Carvahlo, a friend of Fr. Charles for thirty years, was the principal speaker and described



Fr. Charles Brandt with niece, Jennifer Shontz of Seattle

Father's academic, artistic, spiritual, military and environmental accomplishments as well as reading several messages of congratulation from Sr. Pascaline Coff, OSB, Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration in Oklahoma; Bishop Remi De Roo who ordained Fr. Charles at Canadian Martyrs Church in Courtenay on November 21, 1966; Dave Barrett, former Premier of BC; Colin Gabelmann, former Attorney General; Karen Sanford, former MLA and also from Premier Gordon Campbell. Dr. Carvahlo presented Fr. Charles with a framed message from the Premier commending him for his "lifetime commitment to conservation and environmental protection". Dr. Carvahlo concluded by saying, "We have to thank God, Father Charles, for giving us your life."

"Thank you for your love, your understanding, and for touching my heart"

Ted Fortosky, a friend since 1992, said he was deeply impressed by Fr. Charles' commitment to silent prayer and astonished that a hermit could be so involved in life. He spoke of the prophetic nature of Fr. Charles' witness, in the tradition of cosmologist Fr. Thomas Berry. He recalled Fr. Charles' exquisitely artistic photography of birds, including a video he created on swans, his love of fishing, especially casting for steelhead on the Oyster River at twilight and his travels north to study the totem poles of the First Nations people at Kincolith and Greenville. Noting that Father is a teacher and practitioner of Christian meditation in the tradition of the Desert Fathers and leads a meditation group at his Hermitage, Fortosky said that meditation holds out great hope, and concluded on the same note of thanksgiving that marked the whole celebration, "We have all been blessed by Fr. Charles' life of 40 years of selfless service." ■

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