



Les Fils de la Charité
Région France

Paris, February 29, 2008

François Avril
1923-2008

“I beseech you, Lord, may the burning and sweet strength of your love absorb my soul and withdraw it from all that is under the heaven, in order that I die by love of your love, since you have deigned die by love of my love.”

St. Francis of Assisi
(Prayer to ask the love of God)

François was born on May 4, 1923 in Pouzauges in the Vendée. His father was a shoe-repairer and his mother attended to a shoe store. They had eight children, six boys and two girls. Among the boys three became priests. But François did not stay in the diocese; after two years of seminary that “bored” him, as he would say, it is a talk given by Fr. Goison that led him to ask his admittance in the Institute of the Sons of Charity. He was 21. He took his first vows in October 1945 and was ordained a priest on June 29, 1949.

A few years ago one of his team brothers had noticed that when François pronounce the homily at a funeral, he would recall the life of the dead person basing it on three words: **the birth, the growth and the faithfulness**. Why not use the same process for François himself?

The birth. That is the roots. For him it was the Vendée, it was Pouzauges, it was his family. Did he ever spend his holidays away from the family house that his sister Monique kept and where he had his room? We are not so sure. His Vendean roots, it is also the assurance of an evident and solid faith that never left him. Last January 17, while François was getting weaker and weaker, André Périnet went to ask him a few questions so that he could take part in the reflection of the French Region on “what keeps us alive and going”. He answered: “my very Christian family has helped me a lot. I always wanted to be a priest; I had a longing to make the Christians live with Jesus... What has impressed me, was when Fr. Bach talked about the Gospel, and I thank him for that; it is also Colombes that made me discover the Christian community and the meaning of team life... that is all I can say”. The roots, that is also about the joys and the deaths lived in the family. He was particularly marked by his brother Jacques’, a priest, Alzheimer disease and his death, a few years ago.

The growth. François grew in his life as a Son, first in Colombes, where except for a seven year gap, at St-Pierre des Corps and as assistant to the master of novices in Bellevue, he was from age 26 to 55. Let us remember Fr. Michonneau’s Colombes, and then Pierre Dupé’s; a young and large team, a rectory buzzing with people, all the neighborhoods identified as mission territory, and a liturgy completely innovative and adapted to the Christian people (with the “Please turn around toward the pulpit” when came the time of the homily). François lived those times at St-Pierre/St-Paul or at St-

Étienne/St-Henri with much joy and pride. Colombes was a “style” that fitted him totally. But at the same time because of a sensitive and easily touchy (and he was not a man of great ideas and great enterprises), he suffered from being looked upon as “little François” by Fr. Michonneau, from not having big responsibilities and of having always been second. That was why he had always had some difficulties in relating to who represented authority, in particular his team leader.

But François grew in other ways: not only at Colombes, but also in his last three assignments: at Le Mans (76-84), Savigny (84-92) and Bègles (1992-2001) before coming to St. Joseph retirement home at Issy-les-Moulineaux. During his two year stay in Bellevue as assistant to the master of novices; the youths in formation appreciated his humor, his availability, his faith and his kindness. In the different parishes where he served he was very close to the life of everyone especially the simple people. He was faithful to them and they liked him. When he prepared a marriage he would receive at length the engaged couple and they were very happy of that encounter. He attended to the Boy Scouts movement in Colombes and was concerned with the spiritual education of the youths. He liked visiting the sick. In a team he was a very fraternal man sensitive to even simple attentions toward him, like celebrating a birthday.

François also liked beautiful liturgies. You could feel his faith when he preached very simply but very profoundly; and many remember that. A mother said: “I will always remember a sermon about the family! And my children also! My kids loved him!”

Faithfulness. It is a word that depicts François very well.

Faithfulness to his God and to the Gospel since his early childhood.

Faithfulness to the Church.

Faithfulness to Mary; he was a Vendean, he was very marked by the spirituality of St. Grignon de Montfort, but he also noted the large place that Fr. Anizan gave to Mary in his life and in the history of the Institute. On the eve of his death during a last visit by some brothers of St-Joseph, it seems that he reacted as they said together the “Hail Mary...”

Faithfulness to his patron saint, Saint Francis of Assisi, that he loved a lot.

And of course faithfulness to all those he had met with during his life.

During these last years at St-Joseph, François remained fraternal and smiling, but little by little he slipped into silence, only talking when he was provoked to speak about his past, particularly his years in Colombes. He died on Tuesday, February 25 at Corentin-Celton hospital in Issy-les-Moulineaux where he had been taken a few days before.

For Regional Council of France, *Jacques Robbe fc*

Translated by *Lorenzo Lortie fc*