

Paul JAMIN (1922-2008)

I want to say thank you

God, on the night of my life, when it will be the last day.
When you will say: Come I'm expecting you;
In a total trust in you, I will say farewell to my folks.
And I will go at your place
For the great Feast of eternity.
I want to say thank you once more.
For your limitless indulgence,
For your incomparable love.

(Excerpt from a poem prepared by Paul addressed to his friends when he would die)

Paul was born in Dinan on April 7, 1922. His family came from Merdignac. He was the eldest of five children. His brother and two of his sisters are dispersed in Quebec, the U.S.A. and Corsica. Paul attended to a third sister who was with profound Alzheimer disease.

A first call to become a priest reached him when he was ten years old, as he read the life of Father Planchat, a Brother of Saint Vincent de Paul, who was shot during the Commune of Paris. He entered de Grand Seminary at St-Brieuc and that is where he heard another call, that of June 18, 1940¹. He remembered that his father who was victim of poison gas in Verdun had been in the French army during ten years. Three years later when he was chosen as volunteer for the Germans' Compulsory Labor Service, encouraged by the bishops "to accompany youths of the same generation and evangelize them", his father ordered him not to go and to disobey: "You will not go and make bombs to kill the French!" Paul left for Paris to hide at an uncle's place under a false identity. He then became a rebel and got to know other rebels like him, some of them Sons of Charity, who greeted him in the underground. Thanks to them he could take part in the Resistance, then at the liberation of Paris and then enter the 2nd Tank Division. That was also "accompanying the youths of his generation", but an obedience other than to the bishops and Marshall Pétain. Father Monnier, General Superior of the Sons of Charity, who had been underground, could well understand that attitude. Paul always remained faithful to the 2nd Tank Division and to the "Legion of General Leclerc".

Paul took his first vows with the Sons in 1944 and was ordained a priest on June 29, 1948 in St Jean Baptiste church in Belleville. At that time he initiated a summer camp for members of the Y.C.W. of France and Germany in Chatel, a small village of Savoie, where there had been an underground group and the village had been set on fire by the Germans. It was his way of working at French-German reconciliation and to lay the foundations for a brotherly Europe. He maintained his involvement of twinning towns or parishes.

¹ The day when General de Gaulle called the French people to resistance against the German armies occupying France.

The Sons first appointed him to Clermont-Ferrand (1948-1951), Bon Pasteur in Paris (1951-1952), Vierzon (1952-1953) and then short stays at St Pierre et St Paul in Colombes, then Bègles, then from 1954 to 1966 At Sainte Famille parish in Kremlin-Bicêtre where he was mostly chaplain at the hospital and at the Fort de Bicêtre armed forces base during the war in Algeria. Then he was chaplain at Beaujon hospital (with 3,400 beds) in Clichy (1966-1981). These were perhaps the best years of his life; he was close to the patients and to the health attendants. He then went with the team at Poissy Carrières from 1988 to 1998, before going back to Kremlin –Bicêtre from 1998 to 2006. He hesitated in going to the Colombes retirement home and later to Gentilly. He still had a good deal of energy past his 80 years and still had that missionary flame. He offered help all over during the last weeks mostly in Antony.

Paul has been a happy Son. All those who lived with him assert that he was a good companion, serviceable, sharing in the house chores, above all washing the dishes; he did not like staying at the table too long after meals. But he more or less led his life as it pleased him; did not bother sharing in community reflections, which one must admit were often complicated. He was a popular priest who liked the people and had direct and simple relationships with them. He liked to write many anecdotes often filled with humor and faith that he sent to the newspaper “La Croix”. Recently he gave me two of them for “Chantiers”.

What is striking about him are all these ties created and maintained throughout his many ministries. When he celebrated his golden jubilee of religious life he wrote: “Rooted like you in the history of our country, rooted with you in the history of our People of God, I can say that religious life with its fraternal demands never uprooted me from any human obligation, but on the contrary it gave a spirit helping me to read the events and to help my human brothers to be actors of their lives in full liberty.”

1948-2008: Paul was getting ready to celebrate his diamond jubilee of priesthood. Everything was ready: invitations, the readings, the singing, his homily. A mass had been planned for July 2 in Ste Jeanne church in Antony... and other celebrations in Brittany and in Clermont-Ferrand. Let us quote the testimony of this nun who had received the invitation for his jubilee: “I will never forget the young priest in St Jacques parish who had called me to the Y.C.W., who transmitted me the bulletins for team leaders, underlining articles whose meditation kept me from falling asleep, the priest to whom I entrusted my call to religious life and who had given me a booklet about the Prado, who helped to decide on a date telling me that one should never look back.”

It is a fact that Paul was at the origin of many feminine religious vocations.

“When my “H” will come”

Paul had not only prepared his diamond jubilee. He has also prepared his funeral; the thought came to him after the very hot summer of 2003. There also, everything was planned: celebration, singing, readings, the envelopes to be sent to his friends... only the stamps are missing “because the rates may change!”

What ever happened? Paul always seemed in good health, but maybe it only seemed like that; he never saw a doctor. Very tired during the last two or three days he was taken to St Joseph retirement home. He was to go through a series of medical exams. But in the evening of May 22 he was taken away by a hemorrhage. The hour of his passing had come; he was expecting it with faith. He said with Saint Paul “We are not discouraged, rather, although our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by say.” (2 Cor 4,16)

Regional Council of France

Translated by *Lorenzo Lortie f.c.*