



*“If you loved me you would be joyful
since I am going to the Father” Jn 14,28*

Robert GEORGE (1926-2007)

Robert was born on October 1st 1926 in Javille, Meurthe et Moselle department in France, on the outskirts of Nancy where his father came from. His mother was from Perpignan. He had a brother and a sister. Raised partly by his mother and his grandmother who was a school teacher. He lived part of his youth in Giromagny in the Belfort territory where he has always kept faithful friendships. That is where he went to high school. According to him he was a difficult and quick-tempered child and to help him out he was registered with the boy scouts. He says that he had left before the baccalaureate exams (major mathematics) to sell pancakes at the door. That cost him the degree but helped the finances of the troop. His vocation took root in the scouts, but his mother opposed it. That is why he went to study medicine before his military service in Algeria in 1946 and 1947. Since he had reached his majority he entered the Faverney seminary of philosophy from 1947 to 1949. There he chose to enter the Sons of Charity and entered novitiate in October 1949 and he took his first vows on March 9 1951. His scholasticate was highlighted by brilliant studies and “periods of work” at Chausson in Bas-Meudon where in a short time he made some good relationships with some of the workers. Before and after entering the Sons of Charity he was much appreciated as a summer camp monitor or as chief scout. His friends of Giromagny have not forgotten the dynamism he brought to the boy scouts and to the parish summer camps at the time, and his dedication. His influence was recognized; he was a youth leader, a very good organizer but also humble and simple.

He had a very high idea of the priesthood up to the point of having scruples about going on with that vocation, fearing hypocrisy. Shortly after his perpetual vows on March 9, 1954, he was ordained a priest on June 12. In a few words he expressed his wish of a radical donation: *“I will only like the poor and those who suffer in so much as I will love Jesus crucified as a crazy man.”*

His first assignment was at Vierzon where he will be until 1957. He was then sent to the Union des Oeuvres, just when “Coeurs Vaillants/Âmes vaillantes” were becoming Children’s Catholic Action. He was the national chaplain in charge of their publications.

In 1962, he went to Canada, first at Notre-Dame du Sacré-Coeur parish in Brossard. Then he became pastor at St-Hubert parish and the dynamic leader of the South Shore sector. That Canadian period has been important to him; he was very much dedicated and it was fulfilling for him to be there.

He returns to France in 1967 as pastor at Villeneuve St-Georges. Then in 1972 he is elected to the General Council as general secretary. Almost at the same time he becomes pastor at Escaudain in the north of France. His parish assistants of the days keep a very good impression of him: a sensitive team leader and delicate behind a reserved character. He would organize each year a visit to the family of each team member. He was a pastor who loved his people and happy of the apostolic work he was doing. He was as capable of doing physical work in the rectory as of reflecting seriously on the ministry and the mission. He was at ease and a good collaborator with the priests of the sector.

At the General council his interventions and his reports were always short and precise: *“He made no abuse of words but each one was important.”* From 1977 to 1983 he becomes a permanent member of the General Council and so has the responsibility to visit some teams in France. He does so in his own way, discreet but right there, very delicate. He then becomes General Treasurer from 1983 to 1987. It was around that time that an important heart operation left him weakened and anxious for a long time.

A sabbatical year at Kremlin-Bicêtre to get better and to rest from a difficult end of his term of office. He takes that opportunity to write a small book whose humorous title suggested that *“God played blind man’s buff because the veil is not yet lifted and our intelligence is still in the dark”*. That book whose success made him laugh was made of comments on the Gospel, brief, full of life, pleasant, with some humor like in his homilies where Jesus was always at the center and whose profoundness was appreciated in spite of the light way of saying it. Or in the way he wrote the editorials in Chantiers of which he was director from 1983 to 1987.

He then went to Gentilly where he was happy in his ministry for the full five years and he would keep in touch with many he had known there.

In 1995, he comes back to St-Paul and is in charge of the hostel that he develops giving it its present form. At the same time, being a man of culture, he reads a lot and manages the library. He also gives a hand to some parishes such as Auxerre or LeMans and attends to some teams: Independent Catholic Action, Christian Teachers, a group of reformed prostitutes, etc. Until the end he kept on serving the Anizan Fraternity in Quevilly and St-Paul.

During all these years of pastoral ministry of work for the Institute and the St-Paul hostel and in St-Joseph these later years, all Sons of Charity and laypersons talk of his spirit of service. *“He was always available for the services I had to ask for. He always greeted me in a very fraternal way...” He served with much kindness...” “At the library he always greeted each one personally.”* Since he knew this building so well he was always ready to give a helping hand until the end: welcoming the people who came for sessions at Centre St-Paul, celebrating mass for a given group, closing the main gate or taking out the garbage, helping someone who had forgotten something. He would say: *“Ah! The poets!”*

Hardly expansive but with a heart of gold, he often hid his tenderness in humor. That restrained sensitivity would sometimes burst into storms that were as violent as they were short. He was unhappy on the spot of that quick-tempered side of him. He would laugh about it: *“The doctor forbids me to get mad!”* He knew how to evangelize it. About Jesus chasing the merchants out of the temple, he writes: *“I find it very comforting that you also had such bursts of ire that would go down in history. Angers that would not only leave mushy souvenirs.”*

What often got him mad were some of the demands that he heard around that seemed to be exaggerated. He got along with very little and lived his poverty strictly as he had shown in choosing his room. Above all he was pleasant, liked to laugh and tell jokes. As a friend of his said: *“It goes to show that one can have a great faith as well as a lot of humor.”* One of his last jokes was about his tries on the voting machines in Issy-les-Moulineaux.

By his reassuring presence he gave some solidity to the St. Joseph community. But during the last months, having asked to be relieved of his responsibilities, he felt useless. Other serious health problems made him anxious. The recent death of his brother-in-law and concerns about his family made him suffer. All that darkened his last days.

Nonetheless, one of his brothers says: *“Like Jesus who in his parables said more than he showed, the briefs words and his winks said much more than he showed. He was a man of welcome, with an openness free of prejudice, an involvement in a brotherly friendship without failing.”*

He was a man faithful to prayer, sometimes a loner, he knew that one has *“to loose time and sit down to greet the Spirit of Jesus, to let him invade you. In the silence...”*

“My bark is thick, I’m not revealing your presence in me. I also know that my love can be bettered. You are patient. You leave time for my apprenticeship. You grant me that experience that there is no love that you cannot purify, until seeing you as you are, face to face, until like you I become...love.”

That face to face was granted to him in the early morning of May 3, after a day during which nothing had let us foresee that.

Regional Council of France

Translated by *Lorenzo Lortie f.c.*