

# **Memorial Mass for Archbishop Raymond Roussin**

Holy Rosary Cathedral

May 8, 2015

Dear brothers in the priesthood, Deacon Paul, consecrated men and women, seminarians, and faithful of the Archdiocese of Vancouver:

## ***Introduction***

The Lord gathers us today in our Cathedral; to implore the mercy of God on the soul of Archbishop Raymond Roussin, who served as the tenth Shepherd of the Archdiocese of Vancouver from mid-2004 until early 2009. We come together in prayer for him, that the eternal Shepherd of all will grant him the “crown of righteousness” (2 Tim 4:8), guiding him “to springs of the water of life” (Rev 7:17) in the heavenly Jerusalem about which we heard in our First Reading. But we also come in remembrance of Archbishop Roussin, thanking God for him and for the goodness that radiated from his life, a goodness which touched so many of us.

## ***In Appreciation and Love for Archbishop Roussin***

It is not difficult to see in today’s Second Reading a reflection of the closing years of his journey. We read that the Apostle Paul is in prison in Rome and, seeing his death approaching, he faced it serenely, knowing that he had spent his whole life, sparing no effort and no suffering, in his service of the Gospel. I believe the same can be said

of Archbishop Roussin: he spared no effort and no suffering for Jesus and the proclamation of the Good News.

He did indeed pour out his life on the altar of sacrifice, accepting without fuss but in unassuming obedience, whatever the good Lord asked him to do. When he was appointed Bishop of Gravelbourg in 1995, he was asked to undertake the heartbreaking task of seeing to the Diocese's closure and its amalgamation into neighbouring Dioceses – surely one of the most difficult tasks that could be assigned to a Bishop. And he did with his usual serenity, calm and attention to individual people. When he was then appointed to head the Church in Victoria in 1999, he almost immediately faced a serious financial crisis which brought into play another side of his character: his refined astuteness and patient determination. After six years on the Island, St. John Paul II appointed him to pastor the Archdiocese of Vancouver in 2004, where he promised us that “My ministry in your midst will be particularly that of a shepherd among his flock.”<sup>1</sup>

And a good shepherd he was. He came to know his flock and to love us, one by one, personally. All who knew Bishop Ray, for that is how he always wished to be called, were touched by his gentleness, his simplicity and his humility. Though short of stature and brief of word, he was a spiritual giant of goodness. Without even saying a word, he

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<sup>1</sup> Archbishop Raymond Roussin, SM, Declaration of the Archdiocesan Synod. *Let Us Act!* (3 December 2006), 14.

invited us to love Jesus and Mary without pretence and without guile.

During his five-year episcopacy, Bishop Ray many accomplished amazing things. Like St. Paul, he “fought the good fight for us” (2 Tim 4:7). He took on a major communications heavyweight and succeeded in keeping it from fostering pornography. He concluded the Archdiocesan Synod and published its Declaration, whose propositions still guide the pastoral planning of the Archdiocese. In line with his strong convictions about caring for the marginalized and promoting the Church’s social doctrine, he established the Office of Service and Justice, set in motion plans for the Office of First Nations Ministry and encouraged prison ministry, a long-time passion of his.

But perhaps he will most be remembered for “pouring out his life like a libation” (2 Tim 4:6). The Lord asked a great deal of Bishop Ray, an invitation mysteriously extended only to those who are closest to his Heart. In his later years, he suffered from bouts of severe depression, which became complicated by neurological difficulties and Parkinson’s. He battled heroically with these challenges, not shielding them from the public eye, and shared with others his vulnerability and his struggles. By doing this he contributed enormously to freeing mental illness from the stigma so often and so unfairly attached to it.

At the end of his life, St. Paul makes a final reckoning and says: “I have kept the faith” (2 Tim 4:7) – words that, had he been able to

articulate them, mark the life of Bishop Ray. But how did he keep the faith? Certainly not by locking it up and holding it within himself! Nor by hiding it under a bushel basket. He had chosen as his motto, *fortes in fide*, strong, robust, steady in the faith. Because of that faith, he was able to make courageous decisions; to go into hostile territory; never to abandon his good humour; and to speak frankly and fearlessly about his afflictions.

I would like to conclude by citing the reflection of Barb Dowding, Vice Chancellor of the Archdiocese, who put into words in the current edition of *The B.C. Catholic* what so many of us are grateful for in the gift Bishop Ray was to us. Her words are mine and those of many of us here:

I learned so much from him: how to be kind in the face of adversity, to be brave when necessary, to believe in your friends when they tell you something good about yourself, and to laugh because God wants us to be happy. I learned the importance of giving someone a chance, and how to look until I find the goodness that is in everyone.<sup>2</sup>

## ***Conclusion***

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<sup>2</sup> Barbara Dowding, "Reflecting on Bishop Raymond, A Good Shepherd," *The B.C. Catholic* (4 May 2015), 7.

As we continue this Eucharist, let us pray that the Lord will draw to himself Bishop Ray, who served the Church with such robust fidelity and gentle zeal. May he enter and see the face of God for which his soul thirsted, and come at last to the altar of God, the God of his joy (cf. Ps 42), and live forever, together with Mary, the Saints, and all the faithful departed.

\_ J. Michael Miller, CSB  
Archbishop of Vancouver