

GOLDEN JUBILEE
Joseph C. Henchey, CSS
March 26, 2006 – *Laetare* Sunday

It's *Laetare* Sunday, everybody, and that means: **Rejoice Sunday!** See, Easter is now only three weeks away, and we just can't contain ourselves from anticipating the joy and the hope promised by that grand feast!

And we've got an added reason for joy this *Laetare* Sunday as we gather to rejoice with Fr. Joseph Charles Henchey on the golden jubilee of his priestly ordination. He has invited to **rejoice with me!** - and so, we will. Father Henchey, why don't I just get it over with and say to you what's in our hearts today - in the hearts of Sister Mary Judith, Alice and your wonderful family; in the hearts of Archbishop Vitti and Father Hoppough, your Stigmatine confreres, brother priests, religious, parishioners of your beloved home parish of St. Anthony, your legion of friends. We love you, Father Henchey, we thank God with you for a half century of priestly life, and we thank God for your splendid, faithful, generous priesthood! Congratulations!

Now, folks, I sure hope I don't disappoint you, but I am not going to preach about Father Henchey... I'm going to preach about Jesus and about Jesus on the Cross. You heard the Gospel today: ***The Son of Man will be lifted up*** - that means lifted up on the Cross. Jesus on the Cross: the central mystery, 'sign' of our Faith. We think of it every time we sign ourselves with the Cross, we renew it every time we are at Mass; we are marked with it at Baptism, and signed with it at our funeral; we wear it around our neck and hang it in our homes. Jesus on the Cross: *Lord, by Your Cross and Resurrection, you have set us free! By dying on the Cross, you destroyed our death! We adore Thee, o Christ, and we bless Thee! Because by Thy Holy Cross You have redeemed the world!*

On Good Friday we will kiss the Cross, and today, my brothers and sisters, I ask you to behold Jesus lifted up on the Cross, as our Savior: to bless Him, to come to Him, to accept Him, believe in Him.

Maybe I fibbed a little I am preaching Christ Crucified ... But I'm also thanking God for a priest who for fifty years has brilliantly shown us the cross of Christ, as his beloved Stigmatine Congregation is pledged to do.

See, on the Cross Jesus draws all of us to Him. No way around it, folks: you want to follow Jesus? You want Him as your Savior? You want to spend eternity with Him? Then, get on the Cross with Him Sorry! No way 'round it. He bluntly told us: ***If you want to be My disciples, take up your Cross...***

So, we all have a share in the Cross of Christ. On my recent trip, I saw a man from the Philippines with his boy, suffering from palsy - and the loving care the father extended to his son.

We all have a share in the Cross of Christ. But a priest ... a priest is especially configured to Jesus on the Cross – He helps us carry ours; He unites our sufferings to His; and today we salute and honor a priest who has been on Calvary for five decades.

Let me mention some of the days Father Henchey has shown us the Cross.

First, by His offering daily the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. I figure he has celebrated Mass some 17,250 times. Each time he has united himself with God, the son, on the Cross, in offering God the Father, the perfect sacrifice of praise, adoration, sorrow, atonement and supplication. Each time he has taken our needs, our sorrow, our thanks, our wounds, and put them on the paten and in the chalice and consecrated them, offering them to our God. Father Joe, today we thank you for obeying this command Jesus gave on the night before His death, when at the First Mass, at His Very Last Supper, He ordered: ***Do this in memory of Me!***

Secondly, Father Henchey has shown us the Cross in his own sufferings: from his eyes, to his lungs, to his spine, to his legs: this guy is a walking cat scan! For his vestments today he was going to wear a hospital gown! This man is a true Stigmatine priest as he bears in his body the wounds of Christ, and in his own suffering he has been lifted up with Jesus on the Cross.

Thirdly, in his teaching: see, Father Henchey is at his best in the classroom, giving retreats, or doing the scholarly research and writings that sustains his preaching and lectures. Now, St. Thomas Aquinas tells us that the greatest pulpit of all, that most effective classroom ever was – guess what! – the Cross! Because there Jesus taught us every lesson we need. What a great teacher you are, Father Henchey, as generations of priests, seminarians, sisters and people can verify: [ad, on occasion, those of us in one of your classes have felt so close to Jesus on the Cross that we have whispered with Him: ***My God, my God, why have you abandoned me...?***

Fourthly, in the Confessional: I remember at the North American College in Rome, where I was Rector, outside my room, early each morning, there would be young seminarians waiting to speak with him. Thousands have found in you a compassionate Confessor, who can apply the salve of the Most Precious Blood of Jesus to our wounded souls. No wonder you're a little bent these days, Joe, for you carry the weight of a half century of sins of those who have sought Mercy in the sacrament of Penance.

Fifthly, in your five decade refrain of Hope, Father Henchey, you have shown us Jesus on the Cross. The Cross is *our Spes unica*, our single, unique Hope. For that Cross led to the resurrection: it's a package deal. That Cross did

not have the last word. in the titanic battles with death, darkness, sin, evil, hate and despair – life, light, grace, goodness, love and hope win! You've taught us hope, Joe; you've coached us that even though we might not be at the goal line, it is always 'first and ten'. As Jesus was never stronger than when He was helpless on that Cross, you have taught us that God's grace is best and mercy are never more potent than when we think He's abandoned us, when we're most down. Today, we celebrate fifty years of hoping.

Father Henchey ... okay, maybe you're not hitting the fastballs anymore like Ted Williams; maybe you're not rounding the bases like Joe DiMaggio; but for us, you are still like the Iron Horse, Lou Gehrig – day in, day out, you've been there for fifty years – you don't ask for the flashbulbs and the headlines – let the 'Babe' get those. You just stay at it, never giving up, going out to the field every day, giving it your best, showing us all how to lay the game with grit, grace determination, perseverance, hope. And today, like Lou, you would tell us that you're the luckiest man alive! And we're lucky to have known you, 'Iron-Man' Joe Henchey.' And the Church is lucky to have had you. And the Cross has been made more real, and more bearable, and more hopeful because of you. And the resurrection is more real because of you!

We love you! We thank God with you! We thank God for you!

[Archbishop Dolan's Jubilee Homily]