

A REFLECTION ON THE OCCASION OF
THE 35TH ANNIVERSARY OF ORDINATION
OF FR. JEAN-PAUL LABRIE

May 23, 2017

By Tom Goetz

For every HELLO there's a goodbye. But as difficult as they are, GOODBYE's are perfect opportunities for reflection, affirmation, and updating perspective. While Father's transfer to Fort Kent leaves us with a sense of loss and sadness it also makes clear that we are temporarily on a journey to the purpose for which God created us. This sadness is only temporary too, especially when we realize that he is not going all that far measured in miles but in another sense he's not leaving us at all: In truth and in fact, a large part of Father Labrie remains with and within us. As a parish, as individuals, his loving care and hard work have influenced, instructed, and motivated us to become what we are. And so we are not so much saying GOODBYE to Father as we are saying HELLO to the memories of his time with us AND to the people, the parish, that we have become.

Let's take a look.

Combining ten widely spread parishes into one would be a monumental challenge for any leader. Combined with our weather and road conditions it would seem impossible. Father gave his full support and attention to each Church and encouraged and enabled them to contribute to the PPB in the way best suited for them. None were closed, all responded to the call for more lay involvement. Only a quick glance at the bulletin reveals how vigorously you shouldered many new responsibilities. Father has enabled us to make this change.

But there's more...

We could always count on being surprised with Father's homilies. How many times did it seem like he was talking directly to you? How often did you think, "I never thought of that before." How many times did you say to yourself, "I wish I'd taken notes!" And his weekday homilies were no different. Always a new perspective. Always something specific for me. Always eye opening. Remember

the gospel story about the hungry crowd and the little boy with the loaves and fishes? I don't ever remember a homily that focused on the little boy. We're told that we should take these homilies home with us and think about them and use them throughout the week. Father's perspective made it easy to take his homilies home.

He not so much preached to us as he did share his reflections with us. He trusted us, he encouraged us to think for ourselves and choose.

But there's more...

Father spent time with us as individuals and as groups. He ensured his presence throughout this widely spread parish. At business meetings, social functions, faith sharing, workshops, fellowship, and plain old hanging out, he gave us this most scarce resource: TIME. And look at his involvement with ACTS. His support for these retreats is second to none. He also spent time with us as individuals over a meal or simply time out for one on one conversation. One of the best gifts anyone can give another is ATTENTION: simply being with and listening to them. Father is especially generous here. And not to say that I know what goes on in his mind, BUT it appears, at least to me, that he likes doing this. Father is in love with us.

But there's more...

He likes to cook...I think. I can imagine that some day he may open a delicatessen. One of his specialties will be BALONEY sandwiches. He'll start with 12 grain bread he bakes himself, put on a healthy spread of mayonnaise or something, some fresh spinach, a selection of cheese, a pickle on the side...but NO BALONEY. Father Labrie is GENUINE. He does not do baloney. Yes, he is kind and well spoken. He is never rude or abrupt. Yes, he is compassionate and forgiving. But he does not hesitate to say what needs to be said. He does not shrink from the difficult task. Be it his homily, a Confession, or counselling, you come away knowing the truth.

If I may say this: I respect and admire Father Labrie for his priesthood. I love him because he is GENUINE.

But there's more...thankfully just one more.

A woman a lot smarter than I once told me that you can tell a lot, may be all there is to know, about a person by the company they keep, especially their DOGS. You know what? She's right. I could say a lot of things about dogs and about people who love their dogs. About what good teachers dogs are and about how well they train us. But you already know all that. And you know how much Father (and his dogs) love.

Father leaves us but he leaves us with more than what we had when he first arrived so many years ago. It's all about developing a relationship with Jesus. Work every day to get to know Jesus, the God become man. Jesus is a real person. He knows you as an individual. He wants only the best for you. Serve each other serve Jesus. Love each other, love Jesus. Put others before yourself. Detach from but live. Work, and love in the world. You are on a journey, take others with you. It's not a Thou Shalt Not but rather a Thou Shalt Will message. The 10 commandments are not complete without the Beatitudes. These are but a few of the themes that come to mind. There are many more that you remember. Share them, keep them alive and working in our community. Every time you do this you are saying HELLO again to Father.

Father, thank you many times over. HELLO there.