



World Day for Consecrated Life

A Witness Story – “Un Bon Papa!”



“He knew the heart of Jesus and cultivated this friendship constantly.”

Rev. Stephen Kaminski

*CNS Photo/
Leslie E. Kossoff*

He was always just Uncle Gerard to me as a child. His life as a consecrated religious, as Brother (Rev.) Henry Vanasse, of the Brothers of Christian Instruction (FIC) was an aside matter. The fact that he was a founding Brother of what is now Walsh University in Canton, or that he was Assistant General in Rome for twelve years, meant little to my child’s mind.

That he was a kindly Uncle is what mattered to me. He was always interested in what I was doing, how I was progressing, or what interests I had begun to develop. He was a good cheerleader in all my pursuits. He was quick to pray and thank God for everything. He was just as quick to remind me to do the same and helped me to see my relationship with God in much the same terms as the one we shared.

As I grew older, and discerned a vocation to the Priesthood, I began to see how Uncle Gerard’s life as a consecrated religious had really been a blessing in my life. Everything that had shaped him in religious life, spilled over into the family relationship we enjoyed. He was the Uncle that he was, in large part, because he was the consecrated religious that he was.

For instance, he taught me that God does not choose extraordinary people to do God’s work. It is the “work of God” that is extraordinary; the worker is often very ordinary. I realized long ago, that this insight was the beginning of my own vocational journey.

Uncle Gerard wore his office very lightly. He was obedient to the discipline and structure of the Church, but not in a slavish way. He was not strict. For every gentle correction he might offer, there were a dozen encouragements that accompanied them. I am convinced that this quality came from his very intimate bond with our Lord and Savior. He knew the heart of Jesus and cultivated that friendship constantly. His life as a religious gave his friendship with the Lord a quality that proved to be a blessing for many. So, Uncle Gerard taught me the value of having a personal relationship with God over and above everything else.

When he died in 2002, the comments made by his friends, colleagues and former students confirmed all the best that could be said about a consecrated way of life. They said that, “In his youth, he had been a builder of boys; in his later years, a maker of men!” One former student said of him, to the approval of all who reminisced at his funeral, “Brother Henry was, in his native French, ‘un Bon Papa!’ (A Good Daddy)!”



World Day for Consecrated Life

A Witness Story – “Un Bon Papa!”

“What the world is in particular need of today is the credible witness of people enlightened in mind and heart by the word of the Lord and capable of opening the minds and hearts of many to the desire for God and for true life, life without end.”

(Porta Fidei, 15)



This weekend as we celebrate the World Day of Prayer for Consecrated Life during this Year of Consecrated Life, may we see, in all our religious men and women the witness of being, ‘un bon papa’ and ‘un bon mama’. Thank you, Uncle Gerard!

Rev. Stephen Kaminski

Reflection Questions

1. Have you known a consecrated religious who changed your way of life in some way?
2. What part of this person’s witness taught you to live your faith in Jesus Christ?
3. Is there a consecrated person you can pray for this month?
4. Who might you invite to consider a religious vocation?

*Is there someone you would like to thank? Join Fr. Kaminski and please visit **www.churchvocations.com** and add a message of gratitude or story about a consecrated person who has positively impacted your life.*

*Share your story or message of gratitude at **www.churchvocations.com**.*