

A PRIEST GROWING OLD GRACEFULLY



Fr. Gerald Wilson today

On the front page of this newsletter I described my vocation as a teenager, the centre pages look at the life of a young man in the first throws of priesthood and now I would like to reflect some thoughts as an older priest.

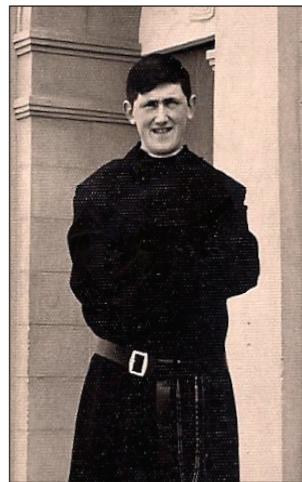
Sometimes when I am in a department store I catch my reflection in a full-length mirror and for a moment I think who is that old man looking at me only to realise that it is me! Old age creeps up on us very slowly. It only seems to be a few months ago when I was able to run like the wind and enjoyed the music of the Beatles. Now as I grow older aches and pains take over my body and when I bend down, the ground seems further away. Years ago my hobby was walking, now I walk with a stick and I am booked in for a knee replacement operation!

During those years I have seen the Church take a pounding. Churches that were once filled to capacity now only get a few of the faithful in the pews, The question of people going to Confraternity has dropped off to a mere trickle. The media and the internet seem to run society. How can we manage to keep the faith in these conditions?

I believe it was my parents who installed, in my mind and my siblings minds, such a strong faith that has kept us all going through such bewildering times. I am also grateful for the support of friends who have always being there for me when my faith was troubled and to my brothers in religious life who shared prayer time with me. All of them have helped me keep the faith.



Gerald aged 4



Gerald aged 13



Ordination at aged 40

When I have the privilege of celebrating the Eucharist it is a special time which always reinforces my faith. As an older man the one sacrament that brings everything into perspective is a funeral when I am reminded that it is not what we bring into this world but rather what we leave behind.

Growing older and being a priest does have some benefits, we don't retire at 65 nor even at 75, we just keep going as long as we can. With age comes a certain wisdom, sometimes because we have actually been there, seen it and done it and hopefully we have learned something along the way that can be shared with the young.

A Letter to Friends. The Novena of the Holy Child, 2019



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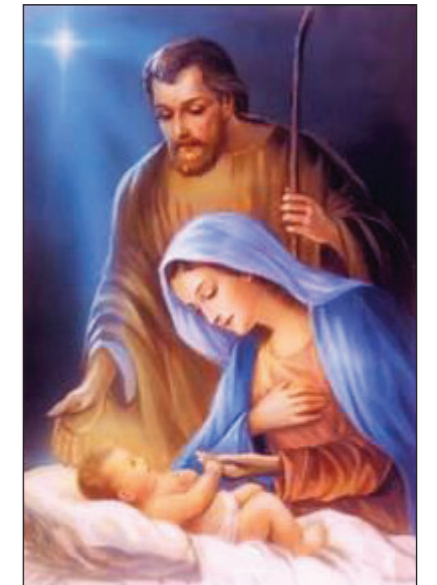
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Dear Friends,

I remember it very well, Christmas 1960; I was just thirteen, along with twenty-two other students we made our way from St. Rita's Seminary to the parish church to celebrate midnight mass. It was bitterly cold and we had our overcoats on over our cassocks. You could almost feel the happiness and joy that filled us; we seldom got outside the front door but here we were joining the parishioners. We all managed to squeeze into the organ loft, except for the ones who would serve the mass.

It was during that mass that I had a strange experience of priesthood. In those days the mass was in Latin but I knew enough to realise that when the priest held up the host he was proclaiming a great revealed mystery – God had sent his Son into the world for our salvation. That Christmas night the message was driven home for me.



As we made our way back to St. Rita's we were all filled with a warm glow of contentment. For most of us it would be the first Christmas we had spent away from home; but that night we felt close to our parents, brothers and sisters, our families who were doing the same thing at the very same time.

The next day, Christmas Day, we had a lay-in, and then spent the morning preparing for our Christmas banquet. After our huge dinner we went up to the dormitory and to our surprise found our beds covered in parcels which had been sent from home. The Fathers had saved them for this special occasion. Our parcels were full of sweets, books and Christmas goodies, by the end of the day we were quite repleat. That evening another treat awaited us, a new television had been bought and we were able to watch that great Christmas film 'It's a wonderful life.' A truly great day and a memorable Christmas.

From childhood I felt that I should serve God as his priest and here I was a young boy beginning my long journey into priesthood. I thought that in this newsletter we might explore the journey of priesthood, from child, to young man, to older priest.

May this Christmas day be a peaceful and holy celebration and may you receive the gifts of happiness, joy and peace for you and your families. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for the support you have shown to our Order and its many and varied projects both at St. Rita's Centre and abroad in our missions. We do hope you can join us in our novena this year to the Holy Child. As usual, on Christmas day the Eucharist will be celebrated for your intentions. On behalf of all the Augustinian Recollects I wish you a happy, holy and peaceful Christmas.

Fr. Gerald Wilson, O.A.R.

A PRIEST IN THE MAKING



Bro. Hugo, Hugo's Simple Profession at the Cathedral

As a child when I was asked what I wanted to be when I grew up but, unlike my brothers who wanted to be doctors or firefighters, I wanted to be a priest. Perhaps at that early age God began to place in me that desire, a seed that would germinate many years later. As a child my family had a great influence on my spiritual growth. The desire to be a priest was always very hidden in me, waiting for its moment.



My name is Hugo Andrés Badilla, I am 37 years old and I am a native of Costa Rica. I am an Augustinian Recollect Brother and I live in the community of St. Anne's, London. One of the most common questions I am asked is 'why did you quit your job? How did you discover God's call to be priest?' My vocational history is very ordinary, there were no visions or any extraordinary events.

What was common little by little became rare. I no longer attended Mass so often and my life was filled with endless activities. I entered high school and with it into a new world, friends, parties, endless emotions that captivate a young man. At the University I studied economics and after a few years I began working in managerial positions in a chain of Banks. It seemed all well and it was, my family were fine, I had a good job with a future in front of me, I had a car, apartment, bank account even a girlfriend. But the questions began to appear in me that for many years had been silent.

The restlessness and the idea that there was something else for me began. I was 26 by then and I had no way of getting that idea out of my head. One day a friend asked me if I really liked what I was doing. My first response was yes, because I had worked hard to achieve what I had. But slowly the idea from my childhood reappeared. Why not consecrate my life to God?

Those words with my friend, unknowingly at that time, were a spark that God gave to my heart. And what was an idea among many, was gradually gaining greater strength.



That's where my religious adventure began. I was happy and I felt God wanted me to be there serving the poor children.

A year later I asked to enter the Recollect Order and to my surprise they gave me the go-ahead. I was able to enter the training and start studying philosophy. I must be frank, at first I didn't even know how to use a Bible, but God and many good brothers were always there to guide me and teach me. When this first stage ended I travelled to Monteagudo in Spain and with 16 other brothers made my novitiate and the following year I went to Madrid to study Theology. They were beautiful years, full of endless emotions.



After the Theology was completed, I was given my first appointment, Vauxhall, London. With the community of Vauxhall this was where I would carry out my year of pastoral experience.



All three are fellow students.

God gradually like a good Father was drawing me back to him. I knew nothing about the Church and thinking about making a path in it frightened me. What will they say? Will I be that good? How do I consecrate my life to God when I had turned my back on Him? Very soon I had the opportunity to meet and work in "Boys Town", a ministry run by the Augustinian Recollects in Costa Rica.

On October 13th of this year in the St. George's Cathedral, Southwark, I made my Solemn Profession, a day of celebration in which the whole community was gathered around the altar of the Lord giving thanks and blessing him for all his goodness. I am already part of a community of brothers, I am Augustinian Recollect Friar and in a few days I will receive my diaconal ordination. Please keep me in your prayers.