

50 Golden Years

of Priestly Life and of Charismatic Ministry

Chosen: by God, from the beginning (2 Th 2:13), out of this world (Jn 15:19), and however foolish, (1 Cor 1:27), to go and bear fruit (Jn 15:16).

A Faithful Family: I thank God, to begin with, for my family, in which the seed of my vocation was first sown, hailing from a community of Indian Christians, the original inhabitants of Bombay, now called Mumbai, whose forefathers were evangelized by St. Francis Xavier about 400 years ago. We were a staunchly Catholic family, praying the Rosary daily kneeling before the Family Altar with the picture of the Sacred Heart enthroned, and always having our evening meal together sharing the happenings of the day. It was from my parents that I first received my Catholic faith, a Christian education, and moral and family values. I was looked upon as a good and clever boy but not reliable enough even by my mother to be sent to the shop to buy something, lest I forget to bring back the change.

A Christian Community: My Christian upbringing was reinforced by growing up in our 'village', of 'New Kantwadi', the forerunner of today's Basic Christian communities, which centered round the village cross, the entire community often meeting together for prayer and fellowship. Our doors were open to anyone, everyone knew one another, the sick were visited by all, a funeral was attended by all, - the village community was indeed an extended Christian family. I was however looked upon by all the village boys and girls as being too gentle and timid to take part in their lively and noisy games and was kept aside.

A Vibrant Parish: Our village was indeed blessed by being part of a closely knit parish that centered round the church, built about 400 years ago by the Portuguese missionaries. The Sunday School was the watering ground of my faith and the Altar Servers Sodality became the nursery of my vocation. However though I was attracted to serving Mass and felt drawn to the priesthood very early, I plucked up courage to become an altar boy only much later, since I was scared that the huge heavy Missal would slip from my hands and fall to the ground.

A Catholic School: Inspired by our dedicated priest principals and motivated by our devoted masters and teachers, it was not surprising that all the five of us office bearers of the School Sodality of Our Lady joined the priesthood or religious life. However I was still the same studious but shy student, who, fearful of reciting a poem for the school elocution competition, refused to go to school that day and so let down my class. But I was always encouraged by one particular master, then a seminarian, and now Cardinal Simon Pimenta, who still cannot believe that I am same boy that he taught in school.

Called: whom he had predestined (Rom 8:30), and wanted (Mk 3:13), to be holy (1 Cor 1:2), to be saints, and loved by God (Rom 1:7), and set apart as apostles (Rom 1:1).

The Diocesan Seminary: The first of three special divine calls or graces was my joining the

Seminary in Mumbai, a disappointment to my parents who aspired to send me to Oxford, and a displeasure to the Spanish Jesuit Rector who looked alarmed seeing me enter the portals of the Seminary in short pants, and puny, below the minimum height as he himself measured me. Added to this my mother also insisted that I being frail should get only hot water for bath. I was well behaved and studied well but kept to myself so that the Rector would often question me at the end of the day if I had at all opened my mouth, while my fellow seminarians found it difficult to keep the rule of silence. He also prophesied that I would never be a preacher.

The Propaganda College: It was therefore a surprise to me in being selected by my Archbishop Cardinal Gracias to continue my priestly studies for eight years, culminating with my doctoral thesis on 'God is Love', at the Collegio Urbano de Propaganda Fide in Vatican City, Rome, facing the Papal apartments across St. Peter's Square, the premier Evangelization University of the Church, which I consider a second call by and grace of God. For I realized then what a privilege it was to belong, as one family and one body, to the universal Catholic Church, with the flags of all the nations flying on the façade of the College and Masses in all the Rites of the Church celebrated on Epiphany, the Feast of the manifestation of the Saviour to the Peoples. And so the 35 of us from 20 countries who were ordained priests of God and of his People in Rome on 22nd December 1956 committed ourselves to meet every five years for a retreat, sharing reminiscences and a celebration.

The Pastoral Ministry: I returned to Mumbai, with the prophesy of my Vice-Rector, that I may be smart and pious but was not good enough to make it to be a Bishop, ringing in my ears. This was however good news for me, since by temperament and choice I preferred to be a simple priest like my model, the Cure d'Ars, unknown and unnoticed, with no ambition except to be a holy and zealous pastor till, after 13 years of the usual ordinary priestly ministry in parishes and parish schools in the Archdiocese, which were indeed enjoyable and fulfilling and fruitful, I received a third call from and grace of God, significantly on Pentecost Sunday 1972, my chance or rather providential encounter with the Catholic Charismatic Renewal.

The Charismatic Renewal: Fun was often made at first of my charismatic involvement by my fellow priests and my ordination batch. At the FABC meeting near Kolkotta, East India, in 1978, where three of us leaders of the Renewal were invited to hold a daily workshop on Charismatic Prayer for the Asian Bishops, one of the participants, an Archbishop of Japan, who had been my fellow seminarian in Rome, and is now in the Vatican, accosted me bluntly, "Rufo, we always thought you were a well balanced and well behaved priest. How did you ever become obsessed by this charismatic mania?" But three years later at the joint celebration of our Silver Jubilee in 1981 in Nagpur, Central India, my companions wanted me to preach the retreat to them, praying that I would not become a bishop, since they felt that I was doing more for God's Kingdom than all of them combined.

Commanded: Obey what I command you (Mt 28:20), to love one another (Jn 15:17; 1Jn 3:23), and to bear lasting fruits (Jn 15:16), for thus you will be my friends (Jn 15:14).

Transformation and Empowerment: For through what is called the Baptism in the Holy Spirit, I had an overwhelming experience of the love of God my Father, a personal encounter with Jesus as Saviour and Lord, and a life changing outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This brought me an incredible hunger and relish for the Word of God, an insatiable thirst and taste for prayer, a joyful

longing for communion and fellowship, and a deep compassion for the heartbroken and downtrodden. There thus came a great change in my priestly life and ministry, urging me to change the world upside down, by giving to others what I had received, through proclamation and prayer. Reports from priests and people reached the ears of my Archbishop Cardinal Gracias who released me, against my will, for fulltime Charismatic ministry in the diocese, the country and the world over.

Preaching and Teaching: Whereas before I never preached outside my parish out of fear and never gave retreats except to school children, I found myself now being called to preach parish missions all over the diocese, clergy retreats all over the country, and evangelistic outreaches all over the world, week after week, for I had made my own Paul's cry, "Woe to me if I don't preach the Gospel" (1Cor 9:16). Equal was the commitment and joy in teaching the Scriptures to young lay leaders as Director of the Catholic Charismatic Bible Institute in Mumbai, and in spreading the Good News as Editor of the world acclaimed Magazine 'Charisindia'.

Healing and Deliverance: The Lord also gave me the a deep conviction that it was not enough to reach to the crowds through preaching the Gospel, but that I must also touch the lives of individuals, through the sacrament of Reconciliation, and the ministries of Healing and Deliverance. Least did I expect that this double ministry of powerful proclamation and of compassionate concern would be recognized by my being selected to coordinate the ministries of healing and deliverance worldwide as a member of the International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Council, and much less being elected the Vice-President of the International Association of Exorcists, and above all spearheading the International Association for Deliverance that has conducted training schools in this difficult but necessary ministry in many countries.

Jubilee and Jubilation: As I am nearing the Golden Jubilee of my priestly ordination on 22nd December 2006, the thought has come to me that I would never have imagined that I would have one day begun to take the Lord's command to his apostles so seriously, "to go out to the whole world, to proclaim the Good News to all creation, to heal the sick and to cast out devils" (Mk 16:15-18). As my fellow seminarian in Rome, later Principal of Fatima College, Quilon, Kerala, told me more than once, "To me you are the greatest miracle of the 20th century". Not my merit or doing; it was because **God** my Father had **CHOSEN** me, **Jesus** my Lord had **CALLED** me and the **Spirit** my Champion had **COMMANDED** me.

Christmas:

As I commemorate the 50th anniversary of my Priestly Ordination in Rome on 22nd December 1956, with the celebration of the Eucharist this 22nd December in my parish of yester year, St. Andrew's Church, Bandra; and as I commemorate the 50th anniversary of my 'First Mass' in Rome on 23rd December with celebrating the Mass in my present Parish of St. Pius X, Mulund, who has always been my model and inspiration and in whose film I acted as a young seminarian in Rome, the thought came spontaneously to the Parish Team that I should combine the celebration of the Golden Jubilee of my First Mass on the 23rd with the celebration of the Christmas Midnight or Vigil Mass on the 24th in the spacious grounds of the Parish, to bring home to me and to all that Christmas is not just a once-a-year commemoration and celebration, but that each 'Eucharist is Christmas' as the memorial-event of the triple mystery of the Incarnation (God becoming Man), the Nativity (the God-Man being born), and the Epiphany (the Infant-God-Man

being manifested to the World). As the priest pronounces the very same words of the Last Supper, 'This is my Body, This is my Blood', Christ becomes flesh, and is born, here in his hands; Christ is then lifted up by him to be seen by all in his crucified-risen glory; Christ is finally given to be received by all as their food and drink and to bring them his peace. The Christmas Mystery has now become a Charismatic Ministry!

Croatian Response:

When I opened the 'holyspiritinteractive' website, I was delighted to find your article announcing the 50th anniversary of your priesthood to be celebrated jointly with Christmas Eve! For me it is you, Father, who brought me back to God, and who brought Jesus back to my heart, so nothing more beautiful than to celebrate your 50th Jubilee anniversary with the arrival of the Son of God into the world. This year was the seventh anniversary of my conversion (22nd-25th July 1999) and of my Baptism in the Spirit during your blessed stay in Croatia.

My life changed the very minute I joined that retreat in 1999. I stopped smoking on the spot (I had been smoking up to 2 packages a day); I have been going to Mass daily ever since; I am in love with the Word of God; my family life has been changing completely for the better; there have been baptisms in the wider family circle; and we are looking forward to new ones...

I could write pages and pages of all those wonderful and miraculous things that happened during the retreat in 1999, then during the next one when you came in 2000 and of the things that have been happening ever after. Dear Father, I love the Church which the Lord gave us and of which you have made me aware, and it is one of the greatest blessings I received.

I would love to translate into Croatian all the articles written by you on holyspiritinteractive website and from other sources if available, so that many people in Croatia can benefit from them. As for my language knowledge references, I have been teaching English for many years and am the Judicial Interpreter. I have so far translated several books.

I rejoice with gratitude for you and for your blessed priesthood. I am constantly thanking the Lord for having given us such a priest; for having sent you to Croatia; for having brought me to your retreat(s); for all the blessed words that you have pronounced and written and will continue doing in the future; for all your prayers, teachings, singing; for your many years to come in the future; and for your coming to Croatia again, I hope in the near future. Thank you, Father! Your daughter in Spirit - Mrs. Nada Pezo.

Fr. Rufus

(NB: The Golden Jubilee Mass will be celebrated in St. Andrew's Church, Bandra, on 22nd December, at 7.30 pm, and in St. Pius X Church, Mulund, on 24th December, at 9.00 pm, to coincide with the Christmas Eve or Midnight Mass. All are cordially invited. Email: frufus@vsnl.com)

