

Bishop Fernando Arêas Rifan in Vancouver

Springtime in Vancouver. Along the boulevards of the city the Japanese cherry trees are draped in pink and white lace, and the daffodils trumpet the return of the sun. The bells of Holy Rosary Cathedral ring out to announce that for the first time in over forty years a Pontifical High Mass is being celebrated in the hallowed Latin Rite. His Excellency Bishop Fernando Rifan from the Diocese of Campos is singing Mass. He is in Vancouver because Father Charles Ryan, F.S.S.P., the parish priest of Divine Mercy Quasi-Parish, invited him, although he believed the chances of the bishop accepting the invitation were remote. But the bishop did accept.

Father Ryan immediately asked the Archbishop of Vancouver, the Most Reverend Adam Exner, for permission for Bishop Rifan to celebrate a Pontifical High Mass in the Cathedral of the Archdiocese. His Grace readily agreed, and the congregation of Divine Mercy, small in numbers, but strong in the Faith, received this news with great joy and began arranging the momentous event.

Bishop Rifan is an especially welcome guest because the Holy Father has recently made him Apostolic Administrator. For many years, Bishop de Castro Mayer, Bishop Rifan's predecessor, insisted that the Catholics of the Diocese of Campos, in Brazil, were solidly grounded in the Faith by their attendance at catechism classes for adults and children. Thus fully armed with the truth, they were able to withstand the excesses of Church renewal following the Second Vatican Council. Because of this, Campos was virtually the only diocese that still maintained the traditional Faith of the Roman Catholic Church.

In 1988, however, the Priestly Society of St. Jean-Marie Vianney, under the leadership of Bishop Castro de Mayer, broke with Rome due to their support of Archbishop Lefebvre. In 2002, the Society was accepted back into full communion with Rome. The bishop now functions as an Apostolic Administrator within the Diocese of Campos, under the personal jurisdiction of the Pope. The letter of acceptance issued by the Holy See assured the Society of their perpetual right to use the 1962 Missal and the other traditional liturgical books as the proper rite of the Apostolic Administration.

There has been some criticism about the Society's return to full communion with the Church. It has been suggested that they could effect changes better by remaining outside the institutional Church.

These matters were set aside for the moment as the bells of Vancouver's Holy Rosary Cathedral pealed out, calling the faithful to prayer at the Mass on Saturday, March 29. His Excellency Bishop Riffan, four priests and nine servers moved reverently about the sanctuary, performing the many complex rituals, adding to the timeless quality of the Mass. The richly-embroidered golden vestments, the deep bows, the sign of peace, the measured paces, all attested to the most civilized and civilizing action that mankind can offer God. It is likely that most of those who assisted or attended the Mass had never witnessed such an event before.

The bishop was assisted by Father Paul Carr, the North American Superior of the F.S.S.P., Father Ryan, Father William Ashley, of Opus Maria Mediatrix, and Father Hubert Bizard of St. Clement's Parish in Ottawa. Monsignor Donald Neumann, the rector of the cathedral, and Father Bradley, S.J. was also in attendance. The Latin schola and polyphonic choir from Divine Mercy, led by Mark Donnelly, sang Palestrina's Missa Ave Regina Coelorum. The music

of the eight voice Latin schola and the 16 voice polyphonic choir resonated throughout the cathedral, providing a fitting background for the ceremonies of the eternal Mass. Although Palestrina's Missa was written over five hundred years ago, the music of the human voice transcends the centuries, and on that day in Vancouver the glory of Western civilization was reaffirmed in the most solemn rite the Church can offer.

During his sermon, the bishop spoke of the many crises in the Church today, and recounted the reasons that led to the Society's reconciliation with Rome. Since he will deliver his sermon again in England a little later, only a brief outline of his thoughts can be provided here.

After the final chords of the recessional anthem, Ave Regina Coelorum died away, many people made their way to St. Mary's Ukrainian Catholic Church Hall for dinner. The Archbishop of Vancouver, Most Reverend Adam Exner, O.M.I. appeared and after grace, the 180 guests present enjoyed a roast beef dinner.

After the meal, Bishop Rifan delivered a brief talk. He began with a short history of the Society, how first under Bishop Castro de Mayer and then under Bishop Rangel, the Society strove to preserve the traditional Mass and Catholic orthodoxy amidst the turmoil of the post-conciliar era. Due to the excommunication of Bishop Castro de Mayer following the Lefebvre consecrations in 1988, however, they were separated from the mainstream of the Church. Fifteen years later, as Bishop Rifan put it, "we had to get out of the irregular situation that we were in." This irregular situation persisted until the Jubilee year of 2000 when a number of priests of the Society made the Jubilee pilgrimage to Rome. Here they met Cardinal Castrillon Hoyos and assured him that contrary to the belief in some quarters,

they did not reject the documents of the Second Vatican Council, as interpreted according to the traditional teachings of the Church, or regard the Novus Ordo as invalid. The Holy See greeted this affirmation favourably, and in a letter, the Holy Father accepted the Society as fully Catholic. Accordingly, on January 18, 2002, Cardinal Castrillon Hoyos welcomed the Society back into full communion with the Church.

Of particular importance in the bishop's after dinner talk was the news that the Holy Father has invited the Society to assist him in the quest for orthodoxy within the Church, and in particular the struggle for an orthodox interpretation of the documents of the Council.

Bishop Rifan went on to point out the dangers of a schismatic mentality and mentioned that while heresy was the particular error to which some liberal and modern elements within the church are prone, so schism is the particular error affecting some traditionalist groups. He emphasized that to be Catholic means to be part of a great family, and a key element in being Catholic is being in full communion with the Holy See.

Alan Garneau thanked the Bishop and also thanked Archbishop Exner for his gracious gesture in making the Cathedral available for the High Pontifical Mass. In a wholehearted gesture of love and support, the assembled guests gave the Archbishop a standing ovation. Vancouver is truly blessed with such a wise and sympathetic shepherd. Then it was time for the photographs. Most of the dinner guests had their pictures taken with Bishop Rifan. His Excellency and one lady were both amused to see they were wearing exactly the same shade of fuchsia. Surely a coincidence?

On Sunday, 30th March, Father Carr celebrated Solemn High Mass with Bishop Rifan in attendance at Our Lady of Fatima Church near Vancouver. The next day, Bishop Rifan conferred the Rite of Confirmation on four young people at Our Lady of Fatima Church. The altar party entered and as the bishop knelt at the prie-dieu, the ceremony began with the Veni Creator Spiritus sung in Latin. In his sermon from the pulpit, Bishop Rifan explained his actions during the confirmation ceremony and went on to provide a brief catechism on the sacrament. He explained that the rite of confirmation, as a further outpouring of the Holy Ghost, perfects a Christian, making him a soldier for Christ. It enables him to fight for the Faith and to be willing to die for it. He mentioned the form and matter; that is, the oil of chrism, the buffet on the face and the words of the sacrament.

The confirmands approached the faldstool, genuflected to the bishop and knelt to receive the sacrament, with their sponsors kneeling behind them. Four young people were confirmed - one young man and three girls. Two of the girls had come from Washington state just to the south of Vancouver, showing that people are willing to cross international boundaries to receive the graces of this sacrament in the Traditional Rite.

The Bishop, priests and servers filed out before processing back into the church for the Mass of Monday in the Fourth Week of Lent. Fathers Ryan and Carr of the F.S.S.P assisted the Bishop, with Monsignor Neumann and Father Ashley in attendance. While seated on the faldstool, the bishop gave another short instruction to the confirmands and their sponsors. His Excellency encouraged the confirmands to persevere in the Faith, and urged them to preserve the grace of the sacrament. He recommended prayer, frequent confession, and Mass. The faithful prayed for the newly confirmed by reciting the Apostles Creed, the Our Father, and the Hail Mary in English. For the

recessional hymn, the choir sang Come Holy Ghost, Creator Blest in English. At the informal reception afterwards, the Bishop's announcement that these confirmations were the first he had ever conferred was greeted with great applause.

So ended a momentous three days. During Bishop Rifan's gracious visit to Vancouver, the faithful of Divine Mercy parish were able, with the aid of Divine Providence, to raise the hearts and minds of the Catholics of Vancouver through the venerable ceremonies of Holy Mother Church. It is deeply gratifying to realize that the traditional rites of the Church are still welcomed, still loved, and truly convey something of the love and mystery of the Almighty. Although it is impossible to gauge the long term effects of Bishop Rifan's visit to Vancouver, the immediate results were a deepening of the Faith, new hope for the future of the traditional movement, and the realization that Holy Church has never surrendered Her most priceless possession - the unity of faith, beauty and music dedicated to the greater glory of God.

With the recent news that our Holy Father the Pope has granted permission to any priest with the celebret to say the Traditional Mass in Saint Peter's Basilica, it may be that the true springtime of the Church is finally arriving. It was certainly apparent in Vancouver that weekend, where the authority, the majesty and the glory of our beloved Church were revealed once again after so many years. It doesn't get any better than that.

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