



"CALLED FROM THE BASKETBALL COURT TO THE ALTAR"

by Father Bruce-John Hamilton

I was born on November 14, 1959 in the city of Sudbury, Ontario and raised 20 miles north in a small town of about 3,000 people called Capreol. I come from a family of five: four boys and one girl. In brief I would describe my upbringing as normal. My mother was Catholic and my father, Protestant. I attended Catholic school from Kindergarten through to Grade 8 and then went to the public high school from Grades 9-12. My life began to take a marked change (although this was unbeknownst to me at this time) when I decided to attend Sudbury High for Grade 13 in order to play on the High School basketball team – a sport that by this time I was totally devoted to.

The year at Sudbury High led me to consider going to University in order to play more basketball, and school was, at that time, a secondary issue. My first choice was to attend the University of Victoria due to the fact that Ken Shields – the former Laurentian University (Sudbury) basketball coach – was now coaching there. After inquiries with Mr. Shields it was decided that it would not be the best thing for me to attend that University. Instead, I decided to attend the University of Saskatoon where one of Mr. Shield's star university basketball players at Laurentian was coaching at the time. His name was Guy Vetrie. In retrospect this move, like all the others, was providential. It was my first move away from home and I began to do a great deal of thinking. While living in Saskatoon, I was not going to Church on a regular basis, but I was beginning to reflect on my life. I began to understand the many blessings that God had bestowed upon me, in particular, my family – which had gone through its challenging times. While this did not a first lead to a radical conversion in my life, it did lead me to buy my first Catechism: The Teaching of Christ. I read this book with great hunger and it began to trigger even more thoughts about God and my Catholic faith.

After the year in Saskatoon I moved to Victoria to join the University of Victoria Vikings. This was, in many ways a difficult transition for me, as I had been used to playing almost 35-38 minutes a game while attending the University of Saskatoon. When I starting playing with the Victoria Vikings, which by that time was on the verge of being a national championship team, I played perhaps two minutes a game. Like I said – it was a difficult period for someone to whom basketball was almost everything! There were some who thought I wouldn't weather the storm (so to speak) but I persevered.

During the basketball season, one Sunday, I went to Church with a basketball teammate of mine (Eli Pasquale). The priest who was offering the Mass and preaching the sermon "made sense." Shortly after attending this Mass, I met Fr. John Laszczyk (the priest who had offered the Mass) –of the Diocese of Vancouver Island – and we began to talk about faith and develop a long friendship.

I can't remember when "it" happened but one day it struck me that God wanted me to be a priest. It is hard to explain how I knew – I just knew that something was there or "something" or "someone" was calling me in that direction. Now, while you might think – 'that's what you were made for' – I can assure you that this thought had never entered into my thinking before. My concept of the priesthood, up till that point, was based on a memory of my parish priest when I was growing up. The only time I saw him;

he was saying Mass or tending to his garden. The life style didn't exactly excite me. Nevertheless, this "thing" wouldn't let me go. In the meantime, I was meeting many evangelical Christians on the University Campus and they were getting me to think seriously about Catholicism. They were all good people and good friends. In a strange kind of way they helped me to rediscover my Catholic faith and the beauty of it.

All was not so easy though. Once I began to realize the priesthood meant celibacy I began to question and struggle. This was not so much from a disagreement with the Church but whether or not I could "do it." I struggled for about a two-year period – continuing to play basketball and going to school at UVIC. In my third year of University I began, for the first time, to really love my studies. Up until that time studies served as a means whereby I could play basketball. In my third year I began to take a keen interest in my studies and really wanted to do well. At the end of my fourth year – the basketball team had won four national championships, and by this time – I knew that I had to enter the seminary and find out from God if he wanted me to stay or leave. I entered the seminary and they didn't ask me to leave – what is more important, as I moved through the courses I became more convinced and clearer in my intellectual and spiritual perception that God was calling me to the priesthood. The only thing that was left for the "stamp" of approval was the acceptance from the Archbishop of Vancouver. On June 26, 1987, that "stamp" of approval came when his Grace, Archbishop James Carney, ordained me to the Sacred Priesthood of Jesus Christ.

One of the great blessings of my priesthood is that I've never regretted one day. In fact, I would contend that the Army, in its motto "there's no life like it," is not exactly 100 percent true. For those called to the priesthood –and nobody is worthy of it! – there is no life like it. Another of the great blessings (I could list many) is that I received my father into the Catholic Church on the 40th Anniversary of my Mother and Father's marriage. I still wonder at the truth that Father Hamilton brought his father – Giles Hamilton – into the Church. He brought me into the world and I brought him into the Church. I am thankful to God every day of my life, and despite the fact that I am unworthy and he could have chosen many others better qualified, He decided to choose me. While there have been challenging days (who doesn't have them) I can honestly say that I've never looked back and I've always experienced deep joy that Jesus Christ called me and in this major decision of my life ... I got it right.

In June of 1987 I was moved to Powell River and was there for 3 years as an assistant to Fr. Dickenson. I was able to learn a great deal from my first pastor a man with great patience & wisdom.

I was then transferred to Vancouver and spent six months at Guardian Angels as an assistant to Fr. Hawkswell followed by 3 years at Holy Rosary Cathedral with Msgr. Monroe which included being the chaplain for Vancouver General Hospital.

Father Dickenson, the pastor of Church of the Assumption in Powell River suffered a deadly heart attack in 1995 and Archbishop Exner appointed me as administrator for 3 months as I was familiar with the people and the routine of Masses, school and programs. I was then assigned as Pastor and have spent the last 15 years with the people there. I was not alone at Assumption as the parish has an assistant – so there were always two priests serving the people of Powell River.

Many of you may have no idea where Powell River is - it is located on Highway 101 on the Sunshine Coast of BC, and can be reached from Vancouver in the south (5 hours, approx. 150 km) by catching a

ferry from Horseshoe Bay to Langdale, driving from Langdale to Earls Cove on Highway 101, and catching another ferry from Earls Cove to Saltery Bay and the Upper Sunshine Coast. Needless to say, it is a small isolated community – a beautiful town of approximately 20,000 people and one I have many fond memories of. The catholic community is busy with 3 churches one which is a native heritage church on the native reserve. The community has a catholic school including Grades 1-9. There are many different groups and organizations including Knights of Columbus, CWL, Youth, Senior and prayer groups to mention just a few. The most recent and notable goal that was accomplished in the parish was an addition of a parish hall which includes a commercial kitchen, meeting rooms and a hall. It was an undertaking that was embraced by the people and myself and I was able to see the completion of this project which was a very satisfying feeling.

It has been a privilege to serve the people of PR as their Pastor these past 15 years and although it is difficult to leave familiar friends and surroundings I am very happy to be at Corpus Christi Parish.

I am looking forward to working with you – and getting to know you and the parish. It will take me some time to unpack my things – get acquainted with you and the parish schedule. As the new pastor of

Corpus Christi I am ready to serve the spiritual, pastoral, and administrative needs of the parish and its people. I count on your prayers and support that I may faithfully respond to the task confided to me.



Your recent pastor, Fr. Conaghan has been more than helpful and kind in making me feel welcome here and I have nothing but admiration for his continued dedication and love of the Lord and his calling to the priesthood. I thank him for his help and I wish him well in his retirement and pray that God will watch over and bless him. As well, Helen (the secretary here at Corpus Christi) has been most helpful with my questions and

requests and I want to thank her for the time and patience she has had these past few weeks.

Deacon Bryan Duggan has also been very helpful since my arrival – for which I am grateful. I have also had the pleasure of meeting Fr. Henry Yeung and I am looking forward to working with him here at Corpus Christi. I have no doubt that he will serve the parish community very well.

Be assured of my prayers and I would ask for your prayers in return. The Lord made it clear in the Gospel that “without me you can do nothing”. His great apostle St. Paul turned this around and said “in him I can do all things who strengthens me.” In Christ, together, we will do great things.

In union of prayer,

Father Bruce-John Hamilton