

**Celebration of 20 Year Anniversary
of Fr. Dominic Borg, OCD in Canada
August 16, 2009
homily by Fr. Dominic Borg, OCD**

Before I share with you the words on the text that we have just heard today, a beautiful text indeed in the Liturgy of the Word, I would just like to give a very quick summary of the history that brought us to this day.

I said very brief, because I cannot say everything ... first of all, I might not even remember everything, but what I do remember is that it began in 1983. We had the elections in Malta for Superiors, Provincial, and things like this. I was approached by the Provincial and he told me that the Friars wanted me to be the Prior at Cospicua at St Teresa's. "But" he said, "you know that we can find another Prior, but if you can go to preach abroad, it is not easy to find someone to do that." he said, "I leave it in your hands to decide." I said that I would pray about it, and then I would give an answer. Anyhow, I prayed over it, and after two days I said "I will go abroad. I will go to preach the Word of God." The journey started from there.

Then, I ended up in Rome. In Rome, we were about 900 priests. We were sent by Pope John Paul II to go to different nations around the world to preach for three weeks ... no money, nowhere to sleep, nothing at all. We were sent two by two. Each group was assigned to a different place. I was assigned by the Pope to go to preach to Liverpool in England, but to preach to the Protestants. The Pope said, "before you preach to the Protestants, you must go and talk to the Bishop and get his blessing."

I went there, together with another one from Spain, and we wanted to meet with this Bishop, Bishop Warlock. The secretary asked us, "do you have an appointment?" and we said "No" ... she said "You have to make an appointment three months in advance." "Three months in advance ... oh my God!" I said, "we are only here for three weeks. We will try again tomorrow." In the meantime, I hate walking, and we had to walk 15 kilometers to go to see the Bishop ... so we went again the day after. Same response "The Bishop is not free to see you. Try again tomorrow." The third day we went again and the Bishop would not see us. She said, "Because, you have to understand that you have to give notice." I said, "Of course we understand," I said, "the Angel Gabriel did not give notice to Mary three months in advance, and yet he appeared to her."

I said that we had letters of recommendation, like St. Paul ... anyhow, we went then to the Protestant Bishop, David Checker ... the same thing happened... the Secretary asked "Do you have an appointment?" "No." "Wait here." She went in, came back and said "O.K., you can come in." We went in and we explained to the Bishop what our intention was, to go into his diocese, to the Protestants, preaching to different parishes. His diocese consisted of 30 parishes. Out of these 30, 27 were extremely welcoming, they wanted to give us food, a place to sleep, they wanted to give us money; 2 were indifferent; and 1 kicked us out. The Bishop said "So you are two angels. You came to minister to my diocese. What did I do that I deserve this? Where are you staying?" "We don't have anywhere to stay." "Oh, you are welcome to come to my residence ... no appointment ... no notice ... any time you want to sleep there, you sleep there." ... Anyhow, we ended up sleeping in The League of Well-doers. There were two big

centres, like for drug addicts, people on the street, etc.,. There was a Catholic Centre, and a Protestant Centre.

We were told by the Pope to keep our collar on. And so, with the collar on, at 11:00 o'clock in the night we knocked on the door of the Catholic Centre, the door opened a bit, and when they saw me in black, with collar, they slammed the door in my face. Is it possible that a priest would be seeking shelter and a place to sleep at 11:00 at night? Then we went to the Protestant Centre, it was about 1:00 a.m. in the morning ... they received us, they called their Chairperson, the person said he was just going to bed, but he would come. He came from his home to meet us. Then we were talking, and I told him I was Maltese, and he said "Is that right? I just came from Malta." So here it was a different story. He was welcoming and kind.

When we returned back to Rome and the Pope asked "Who knows English?" ... we were many who knew English ... I lifted up my hand and he said, "You and you". He picked me and a medical doctor Mark Lalonde to come together to preach in Canada - in Quebec, Toronto and Vancouver. And I asked the guy "Vancouver ... where is that?" He said "I will let you know where it is."

Anyhow the medical doctor, Mark Lalonde, said "Meet me next week in Montreal." He was my driver, my doctor. So, I came to Mirabel Airport in Montreal ... I landed there and he took me to the apartment of his friend ... he himself was nearly always on the road, running from here to there. So I ended up in Canada for nearly three years, three months in Canada and three months in Malta. Three months in Canada preaching in the Montreal area, Toronto and Vancouver and then back to Malta for three months. And then back again to Canada.

After nearly three years, I returned to Malta. One of my Superiors was there and he said "Look here, you are going to Canada with the work of preaching the catechism and evangelizing, are you ready to go with the work of the Order. I said, "Yes." He asked, "Where?" I said, "Anywhere, you send me, I go." He said "O.K, there is Kenya and Canada - we will let you know." Kenya, there is a difference between Kenya and Canada you know! After two months, I received the call from Rome saying "The General has chosen you to be his Delegate in Canada to begin a Foundation." I said, "What? I thought that I was going to be one of a group." "No, No .. you are going to have help." I don't know where it was this help. He said, you are going to be the Founding Father in Canada." He said, "I will meet you in August." "You will meet me in August." This was February ... OK, so I went to prepare for the Visa and things and was taking things slowly ... and I went to the Canadian Consulate in Malta, and she said "As a priest you have to have 14 years of education to be accepted in Canada. She asked, "When do you want to be in Canada?" I said, "By the 15th of August I have to be in Canada." She said "No, no way." dhe said, "This process will take at the least 6 months ... commonly three years." I said, "Oh no, I have to be there on the 15th of August . In case, I will go as a Maltese. I have the right to come for 6 months with no papers, but then I will have to go back to Malta." I said, "I will go as a Maltese." He said "how many years of education do you have?" I said, "How do you count them?" He said "do you have the certification to prove?" I said, "Yes" ... She said "ok, no problem, you have 23 years of education. No problem, no problem, you can go anytime. I will send the papers to Buffalo, and you can go and pick them up there." I said, "OK." So I came, and then I received the call from the Canadian Embassy in Rome that my papers are ready, and they are in Buffalo to be picked up at any time.

It was in December, the 9th, or something like. Carmela took me to Buffalo. We got to the border, we passed through, I picked up my permanent Visa ... not even five minutes we came back - and the guy at the border asked, "Are you not the guy who passed through here just now?" I said, "Yes." "What did you go to do there?" I said "I went to pick up my papers." "Which papers?" "Alright, Ok, carry on."

And so life started then for the Carmelites here. In the meantime, Teresa Martinez, and her late husband Michael gave us a very warm welcome. We went to Brampton and then I met my Superior here in Canada, and then after two days staying in Mississauga, we came to London.

It was on the 15th of August and in London I received flowers and fruit baskets from the Parkinson Family. I said "the Parkinson Family, who is the Parkinson Family? I do not know anyone from here." And then I got to know that it was Carlene and her husband welcoming me here in Canada.

It continued on with the Secular Order. They worked hard. I try to work hard with them. Thank God, today, after 20 years, there are about 364 members of the OCDS about 26 communities altogether. They are from New Brunswick, Moncton, Halifax. There are also communities who now belong to a different foundation but we started them, in Vancouver, Calgary, Ottawa, there is Windsor, Tillsonburg, Cambridge, Belleville, Zephyr, Markham, Mississauga. I am sure I left some out. So you see they are spread all over. Mostly they are English speaking, there are a couple of Portuguese speaking, an Italian community and there is also a Chinese Community, Maria here is the President of the Chinese Community in Zephyr, in Markham. There are also communities who now belong to a different foundation, but we started them in Vancouver and Calgary. This is how we started and this is how we are today.

We have also a parish in Scarborough. Fr. Victor Mallia is there. When I started, I asked for help. We were supposed to be five in the beginning. Out of these five, I ended up by myself. One wanted to finish his doctorate, one is too old, the other one has a certificate from his doctor that it is too much of a change for him, from the States to here, eh? Too much of a change! Imagine me, what kind of a change! I came from Malta.

The first time I came here in Canada it was some time in December. I knew it was cold, but then one day, I saw the sun shining, and I went out with a T-shirt The pastor asked, "where are you going?" I said, "I am going to take some sun." "Are you crazy, it is 20 degrees below 0?" I said, "It is sunny! - Yes, sure".

So roughly that is it brothers and sisters. The rest is history.

We go back now to the most important thing which is God's Word, because that is our mission here in Canada. The mission of Carmel in Canada is to help people to be united with God who loves us to the point of giving His Son to you and to me. That He did. It is not Carmel a land in itself. Carmel is only a means, a help for the Canadians that the Church is offering so that they will live this life of union with God, especially through prayer, meditation, and meditation on Scripture, being fed by the Eucharist.

You were given today a photo of the cross in front of the Church. Why did I give you this photo? I gave you this photo, not only to help you to remember this day and to have this

souvenir with you, but also to be able to have insight into the meaning of the Cross in our life. The Word of God, the Liturgy of the Word today centres around wisdom. St. Paul is clear, St Paul says "The cross is the wisdom and power of God for the salvation of mankind." There is no joke about it. The more we understand the meaning of the Cross, the more we are open to be receptive to receive God's wisdom, to be able to have insight into the meaning of the events of our life.

A very brief description of that cross ... and then we continue on. The cross is made of stainless steel. It is ¼ inch stainless steel. It is 8 inches in hollow section. It is 16 ft by 8 ft. It roughly weighs about 900 lbs. The concrete base of it has 3 metric metres of concrete ... roughly about 1,500 lbs of concrete, apart from the iron and the concrete, and also the beautiful and powerful anchor that is holding the cross ... eight bolts holding that cross 1 ¼ inch each bolt. That cross is held by an anchor that can hold a crane 100 feet tall. We purposely wanted to make sure that it was solid.

When Leo Gulikers was welding the cross, we were discussing how it was going to be finished, how it was going to be polished. There were two options, either we would spend more than \$1,000 to glass beat it, to sand blast it and polishing it that way, and it would be very smooth. But if someone throws paint or does graffiti on it, it would be difficult to take it off, or, Leo offered to grind it with the grinder. He said it would not come as smooth ... but I said, "I do not want it smooth, and I don't want it in one direction. I want it to be grinded in different directions." The reason? Because life tries to crack you in different ways. It tries to knock you down this way. If it doesn't knock you down this way, it will try to knock you down another way. It will try to push you from up ... (with me, it pushed me from up - down). It will try to knock us down from different directions; with sickness, difficulties with sickness, psychosocial sickness, physical defects, being laid off from work, being fired, etc. But when we stay on the cross, we can absorb anything.

The cross, being grinded that way, graffiti, paint, whatever, it will not stay on it. It can easily be removed. You can easily remove it from the stainless steel. And the stainless steel can take any abuse. You can throw things at it; dirt, whatever, and it will not damage it. As the person who stays in the cross, he can take anything that life throws at him.

The base of the cross is made from different stones, different shapes. It is a piece of art when you look at it. The same, again, the parishioners did it. The Masciotra Family and Norm also and other helpers. I am always, as usual, the supervisor ... you know, pushing them and "I don't like that". Getting on their nerves.

The base of the cross is the Congregation, who come in different shapes and sizes ... some of us are very intelligent, others, like me, are very stupid, others are thin, others are fat, others beautiful, others ugly ... these are the different shapes ... tall, short ... look at me... When we put the Cross, God's love, in the middle of us, it unites us together and can make a piece of art. We become God's masterpiece.

Around that centre, the round platform of stones, we put this beautiful heart. Keith helped me a lot there. Keith Anderson, the husband of the Secretary, Anne, and I also was holding the tape now and then, apart from getting in the way. Helping to project this heart, this beautiful heart. I had a small one like this, and I said "Keith, can you copy this, do you think you can draw it big exactly?" Believe me, it is exact. We measured it, it is 30 feet one way, and 30 feet the other. It is sixty feet altogether. And the reason for this is

that it reminds us about God's love among us.

The mission of Carmel is love in the heart of the Church - it is this heart. It reminds us to unite people with God. God is love. Then, at first we were going to place roses there. Already the CWL donated money for the roses. Then as we went along we saw that these roses were going to hide that masterpiece of the stones. So, we were looking for something lower, something that can be walked upon because a lot of people want to touch the cross. Then Ann came up with an idea. She brought different plants. We consulted other people who want to charge us for the soil, etc. The last idea was to use this plant, which is a species of palm. It is called "blue star creeper". We have a sample of it on the welcome desk. If any of you have it in home, or you see it a garden centre, maybe you could spend a couple of dollars and buy it for us and donate it. It is a small blue flower. It stays low so that the platform will not be hidden. It is called "blue star". Mary is the Star, St. Bernard says, that will lead us to the harbour of salvation. Blue, is the colour of Mary, so when you look at that heart at the base of the Cross, it reminds us that we are children of Mary. We have to learn to get the power to stand at the foot of the Cross. So standing at the foot of the Cross looking towards Mary ... Mary, teaching you and me ... Mary, who is our Mother, and our tutor, will teach us how to embrace the Word of God and treasure it in our hearts.

Today, in the first reading, taken from the book of Proverbs, talks about Wisdom. The book of Proverbs, when we read it, underlines - there are two women. There is lady Wisdom and lady foolishness. There are these two women that are trying to attract people around them.

Today, we heard about Lady Wisdom. Wisdom, who is throwing this beautiful banquet, inviting people who are simple, people who are mixed up, to come and eat, so that their emptiness in life will be filled and then they will experience satisfaction, so then they can say that they have a mission, whether they are healthy or sick, whether they are beautiful or ugly, whether they are tall or short, all of us has a mission to fulfill here on earth.

If we know how to cooperate together, then, together we have insight into the meaning of our life. We will be able to see our history as a history of salvation, a history that is constantly touched by the hands of God, leaving behind the fingerprints, the fingerprints of love, and no one can question whether God's love shines at its best through the Cross. God's love shines best through the Cross. That is why we have already two Crosses, and we are going to have another Cross - the one which used to be up there, at the top of the roof. When they first opened this Church, when they blessed it, the Bishop was practically having a shower on the altar. I was told by an usher that Fr McMaster, the one who blessed this Church, who was here when it was founded, said to the usher "Forget the celebration, go and get buckets and constantly empty them." because the Baptismal Font was a swimming pool he told me. This was on day number one - day number one of blessing this Church.

After a few years that Cross was taken down. They could not find a solution to the leaking. I spoke to a person. He calculated the weight, he calculated the amount of iron in the Cross. He said that the amount of iron shrinks overnight in Canada by $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch. So you have to have proper caulking, to allow for the shrinkage. They could not find a solution to it, and this is why there was a constant problem. Now, I talked with Leo, and the small Cross that used to be up there, it is quite heavy, made of iron, we are

going to place it on the north side entering through the drive-way. So no matter from which side you approach, you are going to see a cross. Whether you come from the West side, the South side or the North side, at the three entrances you will find a cross, which is the sign of God's welcoming love to everyone, especially the sinners. "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." So this is why we are going to place the cross there. Besides we are children of St John of the Cross. We all know how much he was in love with the Cross. I don't want to keep you much longer brothers and sisters, but make sure that your life keeps focused on the Cross, because the Cross is magnetic North. When you feel that you are losing your way, that you are losing your balance, hold on to the Cross and Mary will teach you how to stand up when life tries to knock you down. When life tries to knock you down, by embracing the Cross, we will discover what St Teresa has said "Some people think that they are carrying the Cross. In reality they are just touching it. By just touching it, it will break them to pieces. But for those who embrace it, the Cross carries them.

When we see someone who is in love, he radiates light, full of life, because of the way that God enlightens him. That is why Jesus Christ said "Come to me all of you who are weary and heavily burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yolk upon you, my yolk is light, and my burden is gentle." The yolk is the Word of God, the light - it is not heavy, it is light because it gives us insight into the events of our life. So, together, we continue to give thanks to God for the gift of the Cross because, as St Paul has said, "Far be it from me to boast about anything except in the Cross of Our Lord, Jesus Christ through which the world has been crucified to me and I to the World."