

HOMILY
DECEMBER 12, 2021
ADVENT # 3
By Fr. Bert Foliot, S.J.
What Should We Do?

Maybe you were disappointed, disturbed, and even scandalized by our Catholic Church. Maybe you felt ashamed to be a Catholic. All because our Church claimed that \$3.7 million was its “best effort” in its bid to collect the \$25 million dollars it was assessed by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. When the fundraising effort, for which the Church paid a hefty fee failed so miserably, our Catholic Church then tried what was supposedly a national pew collection. Many Catholics never heard of it, and it only raised an additional \$1million. The Federal officials accepted the Catholic claim that it had done its “best effort” and excused it from having to pay its due. But who suffered? The result was that the money needed for healing never got to former Indian Residential School students, their families and their communities. Church authorities were aware of this, but they believed that the Catholic people in the pews did not want to contribute to the healing and reconciliation of those hurt by the residential school system. Could that be true? This supposed reluctance of Catholics to pay has shocked many observers, because at the same time, Catholics did contribute generously to the renovation of Catholic buildings all over the country.

Do Canadian Catholics not care about Indigenous people? Have we no compassion for the thousands of children, their parents and their descendants who were hurt by the Indian Residential School System? Priests and nuns and Catholic lay people participated in that system by operating those schools for the Government? Did they forget, are we forgetting, how the ancestors of these children welcomed us settlers and newcomers on to their land? Have we adopted an attitude of prejudice towards them, even blaming them for their own poor living conditions, for their misery? Do we not see that Indigenous peoples have so much to teach the world about gratitude and about respect for creation, something the world really needs now when human behaviour is greatly responsible for so many climate disasters? At a time when our country is becoming so secular, do we not want and need to learn from Indigenous sensitivity to the things of God?

God cares deeply about Indigenous peoples. Christ became human and died for the Indigenous peoples, just as he died for all peoples. And it was in this Western Hemisphere in Mexico in 1531, that the mother of Jesus specially chose to appear to an Indigenous man. Our Lady of Guadalupe, whose feast we celebrate today, chose to appear to Juan Diego with the face of a mestizo woman, and spoke to him in his own Indigenous language, affirming her special love for Indigenous peoples. For the next 10 years after 1531, there were millions of conversions into the Catholic Faith. Through the rare roses she arranged and imprinted on his traditional cloak, she continues to perform miracles for people who come from all over the world. Indigenous people, their culture and their spirituality are a sacred gift to the world. In a mutually respectful relationship with Indigenous peoples, we will each see God in our midst. And then, as the first reading from the prophet Zephaniah tells us, *The Lord God will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; The Lord, your God, will exult over you with loud singing as on a day of festival.*

In today's gospel we read, "*The crowds, who were gathering to be baptized by John, asked him, 'What should we do?'*" John's responses were particular to each searcher. But we who are baptized and live on this land called Canada, what should we do? We are:

- called to learn about the truth of the history of our country. Most of us know too little, and what we think we know is what was told to us from only one perspective. There are a lot of skeletons in the closet we knew nothing about.
- called to uncover any racist ideas and sentiments within us and to ask the Lord to free us from them. Let us ask for the grace to listen to Indigenous peoples and to their past and present experience with our hearts, with open hearts.
- called to repent, to make some reparation. When the Church asks us and gives us the opportunity to make a financial contribution to the healing and to the emergence of our Indigenous people to a new pride and dignity in Canada, let us respond generously.
- called to learn more about Indigenous culture and spirituality. There is a richness there that can help us become more human, more in touch with creation and more open to the things of God.
- called to demand from governments just and equitable treatment for all Indigenous people on this land. For how much longer must Indigenous

people in Canada suffer under boiled water advisories? For how much longer must Indigenous adolescents have to leave home to get an education? For how much longer must Canada's prison system be overcrowded with Indigenous young men and women? How many more deaths by suicide, overdose and murder can our country tolerate without responding?

Let us listen to these calls. And let us listen also to St. Paul in today's reading from the letter to the Philippians tells us to rejoice. *Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.* He tells us not to worry and get depressed. *The Lord is near. Let your requests be made known to God by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving.* Rejoice because the light is beginning to shine. Something new, something very good and holy is about to happen in Canada. *The Spirit of the Lord is now upon us.* Amen.

Outline of points for a homily:

- The Catholic Church allowed itself to be excused from paying what it was assessed to pay for the healing of former students of Indian Residential Schools.
- Were Catholics reluctant to contribute to those hurt by the Indian Residential School System while being willing to pay for the renovation of churches?
- Do Catholics not care about the needs of Indigenous peoples and about all they have to offer to Canada and to the world?
- Our Lady appeared as mestizo woman to an Indigenous man, St. Juan Diego, in Mexico.
- Calls flowing from our baptism: learn our truth; eradicate racism; pay what we owe; learn about Indigenous culture & spirituality; make demands of Government for justice.