

Howie Calkins and the Paradox of 21st Century Fraternity

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We remember gratefully our dear brother Howie Calkins who passed away this past Good Friday. Thank you to Sammy Taylor for keeping us up to date and for all his loving attention to Howie's needs these past several years. Howie's passing has called forth some reflections in my heart. Knowing that his funeral was imminent, and given that Holy Week and Easter Week in my parishes were filled with already scheduled events, I internally decided that I would not be able to attend his funeral, whenever it might occur. When I heard that the funeral was to be on a Saturday, April 22, because of my Easter week and weekend schedule, I chose not to attend.

While I was comfortable with my decision, I felt, all week long, the pull of this important event. To say farewell to one of our early leaders in the Fraternity, and to do whatever I could to support other brothers in the Fraternity at this time of loss seemed to me of inestimable value. I know that through the miracle of air travel I could make it happen. On the other hand, I felt the call to be in my parish.....or in my case, my parishes. For it is in my parishes that I participate in Br. Charles' charism of *being present* and of *"shouting the gospel with my life."*

In fact, Br. Charles deliberately made it impossible for himself to be physically and geographically close to those he loved and what was familiar: *"I chose Tamanrasset, a village of twenty families in the middle of the mountain, at the heart of the Hoggar and of Dag Rali, its main limb, away from all the major centres. It does not seem possible that there could ever be any garrison, telegraph or European here, and there will not be a mission for a long time. I chose this distant spot where I want the only model for my life to be the life of Jesus of Nazareth."* (Two Dancers in the Desert, Charles Lepetite, p. 53) To be in

Jesus Caritas Fraternity of Priests has been for me a constant encouragement to discover the Risen Christ in all that is *simple, hidden and ordinary*, especially as I walk with my people on the peripheries of life. For me it is a paradox that I hear Br. Charles' call to *be with* on the periphery, and at the same time I have unprecedented resources to travel, to communicate, to basically do whatever I chose to do. I have abundantly more resources than my people! They don't have my freedom to travel, to get about as they wish; my parishioners are bound by limited resources, immigration issues, demanding work schedules and bills to pay which render them unable to often even attend a parish meeting.

In the end I took this to prayer (what else can we do!?). It was at Eucharist, and in praying the Liturgy of the Hours, and in adoration that I could actively participate in our universal vision of our priestly fraternity. What did Br. Charles experience as he gazed into the monstrance all alone in the desert of Algeria? Communion! One of my favorite images of Howie, (apart from him pondering life while smoking his pipe) was him in our holy hours at national gatherings making a profound bow, on both knees, before the Blessed Sacrament. At those moments we gaze into the mystery of Christ's love, the Mystery that inspired and sustained Br. Charles, the Mystery that allowed him to live so apart from the world and at the same time be intimately connected with it. It is the mystery of Communion, Christ present in the Hogar and in Mount Vernon, in the young and the old, in the healthy and the infirm, in the stranger and the friend, in my parish and in your life. Christ is present all ways and everywhere, gazing on us kindly and accompanying us to new Life. Now, Howie receives the loving gaze of Christ in a new way; may we share anew in this Communion. **Amen!**