

## *Father Emmett Johns (1928-2018)*

I was filled with emotion when I heard the news that Emmett Johns had died. Armed with a steadfast faith, he took leave of his earthly existence to rest in eternal life.

I stand in admiration of the work that he accomplished in the generous way he welcomed the most vulnerable. Like so many people, I am so grateful for his dedicated efforts to help those marginalized within society to improve their lives. I express my admiration and gratitude for his radical commitment in putting the Gospel message into practice; admiration and gratitude for his 65 years of priestly life in the service of his brothers and sisters in their search for God and for everlasting happiness.

“I was hungry and you gave me food” (Matthew 25:31-41). This is how Jesus, the Christ, will recognize him at the gates of Heaven. Jesus, himself, will recall this encounter. It’s a story of love that began when Father Emmett Johns shared a simple hot-dog with a homeless youth; a story of love that has multiplied and been repeated with thousands of street kids, boys and girls, in search of love and a reassuring presence. These young people became somebody for someone. That’s all they hoped for in life!

That’s when the parable of the “Last Judgement” became very concrete for this priest who was looking for the meaning of his own existence and ministry. “I was thirsty... I was naked... sick or in prison...”: from the depths of his heart, the priest Emmett Johns heard this call from his teacher, Jesus. It is with the heart of a priest that he responded with unfailing generosity. The youth who had felt abandoned and underappreciated, and even scorned at times, recognized the welcoming presence of the priest they affectionately called “Pops.” It was the homeless youth who adopted Father Emmett Johns. Pops was the father figure that many will never forget and who provided, for many vulnerable lives, a most endearing personal encounter.

Pops, himself, with his questions, anxieties and personal anguish, is now leaning upon the heart of God the Father, who is greeting him with open arms. Jesus will say to him: “Come, blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you.” Pops never judged anyone who approached him in full confidence. Will God the Father not greet him in the same way?

I assure all the members of his family, his loved ones and his friends of my prayers. I would like to thank sincerely “Dans la rue” for devotedly pursuing his work. Thank you, Pops, for this wonderful life-teaching, sprinkled with rich encounters overflowing with humanity. Let’s give thanks to God for this priest whom he had placed in the most dangerous crossroads within the territory of our Church in Montreal. We pray to our God with confidence, asking him to keep providing our Church with such men and women who hold dear to their hearts the mission of living the Gospel. Through the intercession of Notre-Dame de Ville-Marie, we ask God to give us priests with hearts of apostles and missionaries.

**† Christian Lépine**

Archbishop of Montreal

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