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Mass of Thanksgiving Marking His Eminence William Cardinal Baum's 50th Anniversary as a Priest and 25th Anniversary as a Cardinal

Sunday, September 9, 2001

St. Peter's Church

Kansas City, Missouri

Your Eminence, Cardinal Baum, if home is where the heart is, then I welcome you home. Those who consider themselves the high priests of human motivations and longings tell us that "one cannot go home again" but they only speak a half-truth - *one can go home again but one is never the same*. Welcome home to your beloved St. Peter's which must have appeared so much larger when, in the cold of the winter and the heat of the summer, you served Mass here at the age of 10. Welcome to the domain of Msgr. James McKay whose crystal ball certainly foresaw the priesthood in your future but may not have seen a cardinal's hat against the backdrop of an even greater St. Peter's, as the gurus of style would say, "*with facade by Maderno, dome by Michelangelo*."

You have traveled far and tasted more exotic places than Kansas City and that is why we are delighted that you selected this "city of fountains," this playground of your youth, to begin a special circular tour of Missouri to mark the 50th anniversary of your priesthood and the Silver Jubilee of your reception of the Red Hat.

Your Eminence, you once remarked that Rome was not a bad place to be "in exile." Let me suggest that there is one unique spot in the Eternal City which is symbolic of your personal life-long "*Peregrinatio pro Christo*" - as the old Irish missionary monks used to call "their wanderings for Christ." The Spanish hymn, *Pescador De Hombres*, becoming more and more popular each year, tells it all. In English, it reads:

"O Lord, with your eyes set upon me
Gently smiling, you have spoken my name.
All I longed for, I have found by the water.
At your side, I will seek other shores."

(Spanish: Cesareo Gabarain, English: Robert Trupia)

Your Eminence, you have known many rivers, walked by many shores. The place I refer to is the Piazza Navona, that hallowed spot, a baroque ochre-hued statement in stone, which in ancient days hosted such disparate amusements as chariot races and naval encounters. In its center is the Fountain of the Four Rivers, the brain-child of Bernini (1598 - 1608). He personified the four great rivers which, at that time, were known to Romans. There was the Danube for Europe, the Ganges for Asia, the della Plata for the Americas and the Nile for Africa.

You, too, have known the waters of four rivers -- the Missouri, the Mississippi, the Potomac and the Tiber.

In the secular world the celebration of 50 years of professional achievement frequently develops into an ego-trip of mythic proportions. It cannot be that way with a priest. Knowing that the priest, who lives only long enough to offer one Mass, has already tapped an eternal dimension of God's grace, the one who repeats this over and over again for thirty or forty or fifty years does so only insofar as a loving God has deigned to use him as an instrument, or better still, as a disciple of salvation. The glory belongs to God, the jubilarian merely basks in the favor of God's goodness.

For this reason, I am not tempted to list all of Cardinal Baum's achievements, item by item, discipline by discipline.

An Irish intellectual was once asked if he believed in leprechauns. Highly offended by the question, drawing himself up to his full stature, he forcefully declared, "Believe in leprechauns; of course not -- but they are there!"

I can assure you that they are there -- the parish appointments, the teaching assignments, the academic achievements, the papal honors, the honorary degrees, the committee chairmanships, not to mention other roles which are less documentable but far more important; values embodied in the trust of his fellow bishops, his esteem among his fellow Cardinals and that very precious privilege in being a confidant of and advisor to our Holy Father.

Your Eminence, as you celebrate two very significant anniversaries in your God-given vocation, let me dare to thank you publicly for just a few of the multitude of contributions you have made to our Church.

Firstly, to its INTELLECTUAL LIFE. My dear friends, I am quite convinced that if we were to decode the Cardinal's DNA we would find the word WHY and a question mark etched everywhere. He has the unique ability to get beneath the surface of things, to be dismissive of make-do solutions, to be suspicious of so-called theologies which are little more than a pious hodge-podge of sociological patter doused in an avalanche of psycho-babble. To our shame, most of us would be content to know that somebody with the name of Cajetan played short-stop for the Yankees, if that were so; but Cardinal Baum saw, and rightly so, a Dominican Thomistic theologian whose ideas had an influence centuries into the future.

Secondly, we thank you, your Eminence, for your contributions to ECUMENISM. All of us know that Bishop Helmsing brought Msgr. Baum with him to the Vatican Council as his "peritus" (expert or advisor). We may not all realize that once he got there, he was coopted as a peritus to the whole Council. You will find his fingerprints on the 1964 mold-shattering "DECREE ON ECUMENISM," the forerunner of "UT UNUM SINT" and a host of ecumenical consultations (one of which, with the Anglicans, will be continued here in Kansas City his coming week). All of us would admit that we have not yet experienced anything close to the full potential of UNITAS REDINTEGRATIO but hope lives and our God is the God of surprises.

Your Eminence, I thank you also for championing the apostolate of the peacemaker, the RECONCILER. I was one of those Washington priests involved in Cardinal Baum's Installation when he came to the Nation's Capital in 1973. I discovered his episcopal motto was "MINISTERIUM RECONCILIATIONIS" - for me, two awfully long words to fit on a tiny scroll beneath a coat-of-arms. I remember thinking why couldn't it have been "feed my lambs," or at

least, some shorter phrase with scriptural overtones. But we managed to fit his motto on the scroll and I know of no bishop who has ever lived so intimately with his chosen motto than Cardinal Baum has. In Rome the members of the Swiss Guard call him "the gentle Cardinal," shades of Dante's appellation of St. Luke in the "Divine Comedy" where he calls him the "gentle scribe of God," and, I might add, so appropriate for your present Roman position as head of the Sacred Penitentiary (1990), where you act for the Holy Father as special confessor for the universal church. You must feel a kinship with the ministry of reconciliation in today's second Reading wrapped in the pleadings of St. Paul as he begs Philemon, not only to forgive his runaway slave but to accept him back as a brother in the faith. After all; that's what it's all about!

Because I know you would want me to do it, allow me to add a word about Msgr. Gillen, your longtime secretary, aide and, above all else, indispensable friend.

In this city few people know that Jimmy Gillen and I served together as assistant priests in Washington. In many ways he introduced me to the United States and on one occasion, he and his priest brother, Paul, now gone to God, almost poisoned me with pizza overloaded with anchovies! Your Eminence, I know you are aware of the incident when Jimmy and I, for one brief moment in time, became partners as grave diggers. Our business came to a humiliating end when we discovered that an oblong casket does not fit into a round hole.

Your Eminence, I owe a personal debt of thanks to both you and Msgr. Gillen for my first, if somewhat unusual, introduction to the Pope. In the year before the Conclave which elected him, John Paul II was the Cardinal Archbishop of Kraków and Cardinal Baum and Msgr. Gillen visited him. The good Monsignor captivated the future Pope with his culinary skills by preparing breakfast each morning and elevation to the Papacy did not erase the memory. "Fast forward" to Andrews AFB, just outside Washington, DC, October 1979, the new Pope's first visit to the United States as Pope.

Protocol and security demanded that only four of us approach the Papal Plane. The door opens and the Holy Father, much more agile in those days, comes spritely down. He only had eyes for the cherubic face of Msgr. Gillen and with a wide smile and mischievous grin identified him with the memorable phrase, "*Due (uova) Strapazzata*" - "two scrambled eggs." Then, your Eminence, you introduced me to the Pope! For days afterwards the Press Corps bombarded me with questions - What was the Pope talking about? What was so amusing? I just told them he was happy to be back in the United States. Try as I might, there was no way I could reasonably associate the Holy Father with "two scrambled eggs."

Your Eminence - thanks for being here, enjoy your visit and when you get a chance let's have your memoirs - Kansas City wants its day in the sun. Come back again. We'll leave the light on for you and may God bless you, today and always.