

## Roses in December: A Death in Advent

### In Memoriam, John Thomas Foret, M.D.

The death of dear Dr. John T. Foret, 52, a prominent Lake Charles physician, on December 9, 2003 has left a great void in the lives of his wife, Sally, his sons, Ryan and Adam, his parents, relatives, fellow physicians, patients, friends, neighbors and all who loved him throughout southwest Louisiana. He is among the dearest of the dear in our lives. He was so strong, loving and wise.

I am very aware of the enormous sorrow and the enormous joy that those who knew him are experiencing at the same time. Some members of our community have shared the questions that are racing through their minds.

Why this good man? Why now? Why at the prime of his life when he was so needed by his wife and sons? Why in the prime time of his career when he was so beloved by his patients and colleagues? Why do some say, "It was his time. It's God's will." While others shake their heads before heaven saying, "I don't know what this means. This should not have happened!" "My prayers for a miracle were not answered." "Why was such a radiant light extinguished so out of season?" "How was it that when visitors came to comfort him, it was he who wiped their tears and comforted them?" "From what great reservoir of faith and courage did John summon up the strength to live and die as he did?"

Many people have remarked that, since John Foret has died during Advent and his Liturgy of Christian Burial was celebrated just two weeks before Christmas, our sorrow and grief will be intensified. Every Thanksgiving-Christmas season, we will relive these sad days. And Alas! There is some truth to this. But from the vantage point of faith, from John's vantage point, these days should recall far more joy than sorrow.

He was a physician by profession but each day he lived a much more fundamental vocation as a Christian, a faithful Catholic husband and father. Recalling John's untimely leave taking each year during Advent should help us retrieve the Christmas Holy Days from the crass commercialism of the holidays. When we commemorate the birth of Jesus Christ and proclaim his coming glory at the end of time we should hear John's voice. "I love this time of the year. This weather is great, Advent is so powerful. Isaiah the prophet is saying get ready! The Lord is coming! The music of the season is so uplifting. The Messiah is near. It's awesome!" We should remember his Advent vision just before he died when he said, "This is beautiful. This is really beautiful. You

are going to love this."

During these past three years John Foret and I spoke by phone often and frequently spent time together at my office and in the comfortable sunroom of the always-welcoming Foret home. He was surrounded by pictures of ducks, geese and the great outdoors, with piles of family photo albums at his feet. I always enjoyed being with him in this utterly relaxing room. Often Roux, his handsome Chocolate Labrador retriever and hunting companion, was at his side as he looked out on his garden where he delighted in watching the hummingbirds dancing in midair drinking the red nectar he put out for them. Observing the finches, doves, and cardinals eating the seeds from the bird feeders he



**Bishop Edward K. Braxton**

made himself was a special joy. He made a bird feeder for my residence as well and put it outside my breakfast room window. I treasure it.

This room is where Dr. Foret prayed so intensely each day, listened to moving music, read the wonderful cards and letters he received and meditated on the books he read on sickness, healing, acceptance, death and the life of the world to come. This is the room where he rested peacefully during the final hours in which he completed his pilgrimage from God to God.

Our conversations in the sunroom were often about seemingly simple things such as the growth of his broccoli plants, the quiet darkness of early morning, or the meaning of a few words from the scripture. These conversations easily led to talk of God and shared prayer.

We all knew how much he loved us and how much we loved him. He also knew how much we would grieve for him. But because of his Advent spirituality he hoped our grief would be tempered by thinking about our responsibility to keep on doing God's work here on earth. Only God sees the big picture.

He hoped that by sharing his journey of faith with us during his lifetime and during his illness he may have contributed something positive to the way we look at our

own lives and deaths. He smiled when people called him a saint or an angel. He would say, "I'm not a saint. I'm not the main thing, and they are not the main thing. God is the main thing. Love is the main thing. Family is the main thing. Faith is the main thing. Service is the main thing. We must all keep the main thing the main thing."

Perhaps 2,000 people prayed for John and consoled his family during the visitation at the Cathedral on Thursday afternoon, December 11. That night the Cathedral was overflowing for the Liturgy of Christian Burial. It was his wish for the emphasis to be placed not on the 'wake' but on prayer, scripture and the Eucharist.

Dr. Foret asked me to give the homily. But, in truth, he preached his own funeral homily, not only during these years of gravely serious illness but throughout his lifetime. Many people in our community were fortunate to hear the homily of his entire life. I was privileged to hear only its heroic, soul-stirring conclusion.

John Foret often revealed the face of God to us with wit and humor that kept us laughing until it hurt! The night before the funeral his wife, Sally, and their sons Adam and Ryan were at my home. We were talking about him and his enormous presence in our lives. Suddenly, the doorbell rang but no one was there. As a delivery truck pulled away we spotted a box at the front door. It contained a huge smoked turkey with the message, "Merry Christmas, John and Sally Foret!" Our spirits were lifted and we laughed and laughed. We knew John was with us. His timing was impeccable. Even in death John managed to remind us that it was Advent and Christ the Savior is coming!

This summer we learned that John's illness, which had seemingly been kept at bay for two and one half years, had become more aggressive and more severe. He responded, "I am going to keep on going as long as I can. I am going to enjoy every day and thank God for it." And so he did! He said, "As a physician, I have marveled at the wonders of the human body. But our little 'pea brain' cannot begin to grasp the infinite wisdom of divine providence. God is aware of everything we do and everything that happens to us. We must never give up our trust in Him."

In response to undeniably bad news, this good and dear man aspired nobly, served humbly, and adventured daringly. Like the late Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, the Archbishop of Chicago, whose death-bed book, The Gift of Peace

he found so helpful, John Foret unselfishly shared his experiences with other melanoma patients, giving them the benefit of his knowledge and encouraging them not to give up and to live each day as full



**John T. Foret, M.D.**

ly as possible and to trust in God's great providence.

The radical source of the energy that fueled John's life was his unshakable faith in God, his relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ and his devotion to the presence of Christ in the Scriptures and the Eucharist, nourished by his faithful presence in the Cathedral for Sunday Mass. Like, Mrs. Kathryn Coleman, "The Lady in the Front Pew," I will always see John and his family in their places just to the right of the pulpit.

After a particularly moving visit with John and Sally, I wrote to him saying, "With each passing day, the time I spend with you and Sally has become more clearly sacramental, a moment of grace. Your spiritual serenity and your profound trust in God in the face of death is a revelation. More than that, it is an encounter with Christ. Time spent in your presence challenges, renews and deepens my faith. You are a gift." "There was a man, one sent from God whose name was John." *John 1:6*. For all of us, John Foret has indeed been a man sent from God.

The homily of Dr. Foret's life continued with the comforting and challenging scripture readings he himself chose for his funeral.

"The souls of the just are in the hands of God and no torment shall touch them. They seem in the view of the foolish to be dead. But they are at peace. God tried them and found them worthy." And from Paul's letter to the Christians in Thessalonica, "I am the way the Truth and the Life." We must ask ourselves in all sincerity in the weeks and months ahead, how Jesus is our way, our truth and our life at work, in school, in our families and in our communities.

As for me, know that I was drawn to my dear friend John not so much because he was ill and I felt compassion for him. I was drawn to him because he was good and I wanted to be around goodness. Because of our intimate times of praying together and sharing the major truths of our soul space, I am a better person, a better Christian, a better Priest and a better Bishop. In him I had a reminder, for a time, of my only brother, Lawrence, who sadly went before him. Now I have lost the friend of a lifetime!

I cannot now speak of Dr. Foret in the past as one who was. To me he lingers in the present as one who is. And in faith we know that he still is in Christ.

Many people knew that John loved the outdoors. He particularly enjoyed gardening. He had a special affection for garden roses, which have such an exquisite fragrance. We wanted to surround him with roses in the Cathedral. However, his friends who cultivated roses did not think they would have anything beyond buds in cold December. But on that day of days when they were needed, they found ample numbers of fully blooming roses in December.

As I and his dear ones traced the cross of Jesus Christ over his eminently gentle remains for the last time, there was far more joy than sadness in the face of this death in Advent because in faith we are confident that for John it is Christmas!

Light candles everywhere. It is Christmas! Sing Gloria in excelsis Deo. It is Christmas! It is Christmas! It is Christmas! And for our beloved John Foret, it is Christmas that lasts forever! Amen! Amen! Alleluia!



So they went in haste and found Mary and Joseph and the infant lying in the manger. - Luke 2:16

## Scripture reflection with Bishop Braxton set Sunday, Dec. 21

LAKE CHARLES - Bishop Edward K. Braxton will offer a reflection on the Scripture readings for Advent and Christmas from 2 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. on Sunday, Dec. 21, in the Daily Mass Chapel of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. All are welcome to attend.

The informal presentation and discussion will provide the opportunity for attendees to ask Bishop Braxton questions about the

meaning and interpretation of scripture passages and their relevance to daily life. Participants may also ask questions about the teachings and practices of the Catholic Church that they may not understand.

Bishop Braxton hopes that this time of reflection on the Word of God will help people to prepare themselves and their families to celebrate the true meaning of Christmas.

## New CDC Abortion Numbers

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) published its latest survey on abortion in the United States on the day after Thanksgiving. The survey, reporting legal induced abortions obtained in the United States in the year 2000, contains some eye-opening findings you will not likely read in the mainstream press.

### Vocation retreat set Jan. 16-18

A vocation retreat, jointly sponsored by the Dioceses of Lake Charles, Alexandria Shreveport and Baton Rouge, is scheduled for Jan. 16-18, at the Rosaryville Spirit Life Center in Ponchatoula, La., located in the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

The retreat is intended for young men, 16 years and older, who are discerning God's will in their lives.

It invites participants to look at their spiritual journey in light of the Lord Jesus' call to a life of personal holiness.

The retreat will help a young man to reflect on and judge how best to respond to God's call, in priesthood or the religious life.

Bishops of the dioceses as well as vocation directors are scheduled to attend. The retreat is staffed by seminarians of the dioceses. Involved.

For more information contact your church's pastor or call the Vocation Office, 337-439-7426, Ext. 17.

The survey presents data which is voluntarily reported by cities and states, the mechanisms by which cities and states gather the data in the first place can vary widely, and some states don't report at all. California, which in 1997 was responsible for 23 percent of all abortions nationwide, decided in 1998 to remain mum on abortion within its borders, as did New Hampshire and Alaska. Since the CDC has no information from jurisdictions which together account for nearly one-fourth of abortions nationwide, it is impossible to have any real analysis of national trends. Still, the publication gives a startling, if incomplete, picture of abortion in the United States at the end of the last century.

Some of the findings include the following:

- Women die from legal abortion. The survey reports that 14 women died as a result of complications from known legal induced abortion in 1998 and 1999. Data on deaths from 2000 is not yet available. In fact, from 1973 to 1999 at least 327 women have died from legal induced abortion according to the study.

- Abortion rates change with race. In the areas for which race was adequately reported, "the abortion rate for black women was 3.1 times the rate for white women." In addition, "the abortion ratio for black women (503 per 1,000 per live births) was 3.0 times the ratio for white women (167 per 1,000 live births)."



## Fourth Sunday of Advent

Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, "Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled."

Luke 1:39-45

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