



2nd Annual Conference – MI Canada

The 2nd Annual Conference of MI Canada took place on June 20th, 2009, and was again held at the St. Augustine's Seminary in Toronto. This day was reminiscent of last year's Conference because like on the day of last year's Conference it rained heavily. Although the attendance was down from last year, those attended were very satisfied with the proceedings. At this year's Conference 6 persons were consecrated during the Mass presided over by Msgr. Nusca, with Fr. Patrick, Fr. Henry and Fr. Mariush as concelebrants.

Our two speakers at the Conference were, Msgr. Robert Nusca and Fr. Patrick Greenhough.

Msgr. Nusca's talk was on the *life*, the *mission* and the *message* of St. Paul:

In the early Church Paul emerges as the "Thirteenth Apostle" who, although not an eyewitness to the events described in the Gospels, stands with Peter and the Twelve as one of the pillars of the Church founded by Our Lord. Secondly, Paul's mission is universal in scope, as he endeavors to communicate the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the whole world. Finally, Paul's letters contain a timely message that speaks to us today about conversion and the farther reaches of human transformation in Christ.

Fr Patrick Greenhough's talk was on the Conversion of Alphonse Ratisbonne:

Conversions are often something we want for someone else yet the conversion of another person often brings about a conversion within ourselves as well.

The conversions of St. Paul, St. Augustine, and St. Francis are just a few examples of how the conversion of one had a large impact upon the many, and how the conversion of one person impacts the lives and faith of many people centuries later.

Conversions may at times appear to be instantaneous but the ground work for the conversion is often laid through several experiences and relationships. This is truly the case with the conversion of Alphonse Ratisbonne.

In 1842, a 28 year old French Jew named Alphonse Ratisbonne was visiting Rome. He was the youngest son of an important banking family in Strasbourg, a Jew by birth but did not believe in God. He was extremely anti-Catholic and a rationalist in his thinking.

During his visit in Rome, Alphonse visited a Catholic man named Theodore de Bussieres, a friend of his brother, well known for his books on travel, whom he had met in Naples and had invited him to Rome.

In their discussions, Theodore challenged Alphonse to wear the Miraculous Medal. Alphonse accepted the challenge considering it to be superstition and hogwash.

After getting Alphonse to wear the medal, he asked him to also recite *Memorare*. At first he refused, but after repeated begging he accepted and wrote the prayer down. Alphonse read it over and over again, in order to discover what could give it such value. Eventually Alphonse learned it by heart and went about repeating it mechanically, like a tune in one's mind.

Around noon, Alphonse went into a café on the Piazza di Spagna. At one o'clock Theodore had to make arrangements for the funeral of his friend the Count at the Church of San Andrea delle Fratte and Alphonse offered to go with him to the Church and later go for a walk.

Theodore went into the sacristy to make arrangement, while Alphonse began to walk around the church and thought to himself what an ugly church it was.

When Theodore returned he could not find Alphonse until he caught sight of him kneeling in front of the chapel of St. Michael the Archangel. He went up and touched him three or four times before he became aware of Theodore's presence. Alphonse then looked up and said, "*I have seen Her!*"

Alphonse then recounted how the church seemed to disappear before him except that one single chapel of St. Michael which had become filled with light.

There he saw standing on the altar, the Virgin Mary , tall, clothed in splendor, full of majesty and sweetness, just as she was on his Miraculous Medal.

An irresistible force drew him towards her. She made a sign with her hand to kneel. He tried to look up but all he could see was her hands. She said not a word, but he understood all. He saw before him the fearful miseries from which he had been rescued by the mercy of God. It was as if the Catholic faith was breathed into him.

His first desire was to join the Trappist and spend his time meditating on the things of eternity.

He was baptized on Jan.31, 1843 at the Jesuit Church of the Gesu and later became a Jesuit.

At the end of his writings he says that he offered to God, for all of his life, to be employed in the service of the Church and of his brothers under the protection of Mary. After six years of being a Jesuit he left them and joined his brother Theodore to found the Congregation of the Priests and Dames of Sion whose principle work was the conversion of the Jews. He eventually spends the rest of his life ministering in the Holy Land.

Unable to understand why he was granted this extraordinary grace a friend told him that it was in choosing an instrument as unworthy as himself, that Mary knew all of the glory due to God would never be attributed to him.

One day the founders of the Dames of Sion asked Alphonse if he still saw the Blessed Virgin. He answer was, "*She is more and more lovely,*" and then he bowed his head.

He was even more reticent on the subject of interior trials from which he suffered so long and so bitterly.

On May 6, 1884 he died. His last words were, "*All my wishes have been granted!*"

Then he gently closed his eyes and seem to fall peacefully asleep.

St. Maximilian Kolbe and the Conversion of Alphonse Ratisbonne :

It was during the First World War and the Masons were marching on the Vatican and protesting against the Church and the Pope and St. Maximilian wanted to go to the headquarters of the Masons but his superior told him not.

The Church of St. Andrea delle Fratte was only about a 15 minute walk from the Pontifical Theological University of the Seraphicum where St. Maximilian was studying.

While praying his Divine Office in the chapel of the Seraphicum Jan. 20, 1916, he read of the conversion of Alphonse Ratisbonne.

He believed that if Our Lady could convert this one hardened sinner why not the whole world so with 6 other Franciscan seminarians he founded the Militia of the Immaculata at the Conventual Franciscan seminary of the Seraphicum on Oct. 16, 1917.

Several times St Maximilian would recount the story of the conversion of Alphonse Ratisbonne to others. So moved was he and so great an impact did it have upon his life that after he was ordained, St. Maximilian said his first Mass on the altar of Our Lady of the Miracle where Alphonse was converted.

Mary continues to convert people to her Son. Our Lady uses people and things to bring about the conversion of others.

What kind of instruments are we?

Do we help or hurt; do we assist or prevent the conversion of others by our words and actions?

There are numerous ways of being an instrument of conversion for others.

1. Witness like St. Maximilian did in Japan or St. Francis as he walked the street with his hood up.
2. By Conversation and Preaching
3. Prayer

Most of all we must be led by the Holy Spirit and Mary His Spouse and not by our egos or our desires in the process of converting others and the world to Christ.