



photo by Elizabeth Perdomo

ARCHBISHOP JOB

1946 - 2009

December 18th marks the first anniversary of the repose of Archbishop Job. At the time of his death, as reflections, eulogies and obituaries began appearing on the internet and other venues, I hesitated to add my own thoughts and impressions. My reluctance to write and speak about the Archbishop did not stem from not having anything to share with our parish and with others. Instead, my reticence came from a desire to leave the Archbishop's memory in peace. His death occurred during one of the most difficult crises faced by our Church since the granting of autocephaly in 1970. Indeed, so many words about Archbishop Job's courageous stand against all the dark powers that sought to divide our Church were often eloquently articulated. Yet, to frame his life and ministry within this most unfortunate period of our young autocephalous Church would be to ignore, deny or diminish his life's work as a humble servant of God who sought to "become less so Christ could become more" in the lives of all he sought to serve.

In January 1984, Archbishop Job who, at that time, was bishop of Hartford and New England assigned me to Holy Trinity Cathedral. Until the time of his election to the see of Chicago I was, for ten years, his confessor. For ten years, he was mine. I clearly remember that there was nothing extra-ordinary about his confessions. However, in retrospect, it was these regular and straightforward encounters as we stood before the altar that revealed a very extraordinary human being who first sought to be faithful to his monastic calling. Obedience, poverty and chastity were words that defined his character - his very being.

All the ministries Archbishop Job undertook were tempered by his monastic vocation. As an iconographer, musician, composer, liturgist, parish priest and bishop of two major cities, Archbishop Job stood in the spiritual arena not as an indifferent spectator but as one who struggled "to fight the good fight." He never saw himself as one who stood above the other. He numbered himself with the struggling who yearned to move from darkness into the light. His fears and hesitations to lead came from recognizing his own personal limitations. He also realized that the gifts he possessed needed further development. His openness - his honesty - regarding himself kept him from placing himself above others. This enabled him to draw near to others without guile or pretence. His honest introspection and humility made it possible for so many to draw near to him -those seeking a father, a pastor, a brother, a friend.

Archbishop Job always sought to maintain communion with the other even when it was to his detriment. He persistently focused on what he perceived to be the best in the other. What at times appeared to be an unreasonable desire to maintain oneness among brothers and sisters in the spirit of sacramental communion often resulted in his being verbally attacked, slandered and ridiculed. Often he would unjustly blame himself. He understood a break in communion as a personal defeat. Disunity of persons, especially during the crisis he sought to resolve and which he was blamed for starting, weighed heavily upon his conscience. The broken communion of persons veiled by the guise of sacramental con-celebration was a hypocrisy that he did not separate himself from but struggled to correct even to the point of standing in opposition to those he loved.

Though Archbishop Job perceived himself as "simple man", he was in fact quite complex. He loved company but sought solitude which sometimes exposed his loneliness. He loved to laugh but bore an inner sadness. He loved the services especially the great feasts. He joyfully celebrated Pascha and Christmas with his Cathedral flock. But he was also eager to return home to be with his beloved cat that he took with him to Chicago. When the cat died, he buried it in his little urban garden. The marker on the grave reads Dushenka.

Archbishop Job's legacy of obedience, poverty and chastity are inseparably bound to a diakonia rooted in truth, beauty, kindness and humility. Like the nineteenth century impressionists who he admired, Archbishop Job was extremely sensitive to the dynamism of each human life as it interacted with the multifaceted light of God's presence and intervention. His life confirms that the greatness of divine love, revealed through the cross, is poured out in various shades and intensities by those who have overcome the fear of loving the other.

Father Robert M. Arida