



THE LONG VIEW

It helps, now and then, to step back and take a long view.
The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is even beyond our vision.
We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent
enterprise that is God's work.

Nothing we do is complete, which is a way of saying
that the Kingdom always lies beyond us.

No statement says all that could be said.

No prayer fully expresses our faith.

No confession brings perfection.

No pastoral visit brings wholeness.

No program accomplishes the Church's mission.

No set of goals and objectives includes everything.

This is what we are about:

We plant the seeds that one day will grow.

We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.

We lay foundations that will need further development.

We provide yeast that produces far beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.

This enables us to do something, and to do it very well.

It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an
opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest.

We may never see the end results,

But that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.

We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs.

We are prophets of a future not our own.

This prayer was composed by Bishop Ken Untener of Saginaw, for a homily by Cardinal John Dearden in 1979 at a celebration of departed priests. The words of the prayer are often attributed to Oscar Romero, perhaps because they beautifully summarise his philosophy, but they were never spoken by him.

TAKING THE LONG VIEW

Bishop Untener's reflection helps us put our important work in perspective. We are challenged to see that our contributions are all part of something much bigger than ourselves.

Consider this: every day, you nurture processes which you did not begin. Likewise, today you will make a connection, share a word or idea, perhaps even launch a project, whose final impact you will never know.

This reflection may stir an appreciation for providence: the rich theological notion that reminds us – when all our plotting and hard work is done – to rest well in the knowledge that God is working through and holding on to this enterprise, loving it all far more than we ever could.

For reflection:

Brainstorm a list of important things in which you take part in your work: the successes, the epic projects, the big strategies. Consider too the day's smaller efforts: the encouraging text, the gracious embrace, even the washing of hands. What have you planted that you will not see bear fruit?

Gaze at horizons. Look at the stars in the sky or the sands on a shore. Meditate on a garden or focus your attention on a fertile field. Find images that free you to think about the magnificent enterprise of our shared life – and your part in it – with a larger, longer view.

Share your reflections with a friend or trusted colleague. What new insights can be gained?

