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Canadian Cardinal Michael Czerny and Bishop Gary Gordon of Victoria, British Columbia, stan

Canadian Cardinal Michael Czerny and Bishop Gary Gordon of Victoria, British Columbia, stand near the coffin of retired Victoria Bishop Remi De Roo during his funeral Mass at St. Andrew's Cathedral in Victoria Feb. 12, 2022. (CNS photo/Kevin Doyle, for Canadian Catholic News)



by Catholic News Service

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VICTORIA, British Columbia — A Canadian cardinal who works at the Vatican remembered Bishop Remi De Roo, in all his strengths and faults, for his commitment to promoting social justice.

Bishop De Roo "inspired and challenged" him in the decades they got to know each other after the Second Vatican Council, said Cardinal Michael Czerny, interim head of the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development. The cardinal delivered the homily at Feb. 12 at St. Andrew's Cathedral in Victoria, where Bishop De Roo served as head of the diocese from 1962 to 1999. Bishop De Roo died Feb. 1 at the age of 97.

The cardinal told the clergy and laity — including Jewish, Anglican, Muslim and Indigenous representatives — that Bishop De Roo "came across as decisive, frank and even abrasive at times."

"He was also complex, controversial, and faithful to his convictions until the end," the cardinal told hundreds in attendance, which was limited to half the church's capacity due to British Columbia government restrictions.

Above all, Bishop De Roo, who attended the Second Vatican Council, "dedicated the subsequent 55 years to continually rediscovering what it means to live as a council Christian and as a council church ... and now indeed as a synodal church," he said, referring to the current Synod for Bishops on synodality.

The cardinal listed several areas that were fundamental to the ministry of his "admired friend," including: his friendships with Indigenous communities of his diocese; his commitment to social justice; his encouragement to laypeople; his promotion of the role of women and rejection of "patriarchal models that confine them to subordinate positions and offend their human and baptismal dignity;" and his concern for priests who had been laicized and the stigmatization that went along with it.

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In the spirit of his late friend, Cardinal Czerny warned against ending up "far from the people of God" and outside the church "if we affiliate with elites instead of trusting in the Lord and opting for the poor ... if we huddle for assurance within our own closed groups instead of going out to the existential peripheries."

The cardinal said Pope Francis may have had the late bishop in mind when he spoke to lay catechists and urged them to value others' talents, "walk the paths of the people of our time, stooping to tend to those on the margins," welcome strangers and "fearlessly engage in dialogue with those with different ideas," and "approach those wounded by life (and) bind their wounds with compassion."

Saying farewell to Bishop De Roo, he said, was an opportunity to reflect on "our adherence to the Lord Jesus who said, 'When I was hungry you gave me to eat.' We mustn't just sit here. Let us review our lives on both the individual and ecclesial levels. Let us give thanks for Vatican II and align with its mission of evangelization."

Victoria Bishop Gary Gordon celebrated the Mass and expressed thanks to those gathered in the cathedral.

Among those attending were Winnipeg Archbishop Richard Gagnon, who was bishop of Victoria from 2004 to 2014; Kamloops Bishop Joseph Nguyen; and former Canadian Sen. Douglas Roche, a friend of Bishop De Roo for 60 years.