

## The First Five Bishops . . . a Personal Recollection

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Name man. His refined and cultivated common sense, backed up by wide reading, a prodigious memory, a strong faith and a life of prayer, is in evidence whenever he speaks, even at the age of 84.

Any bishop has to solve many diocesan crises in his time and Bishop Kearney has had his share. He has taken the good days and bad days with equal hand; calm trust in God that's the word for him.

The morning of his major operation at St. Mary's Hospital, December 11, 1957, I saw him before he went to the table. He knew he might not survive the operation but you'd think it was any other day. We talked of inconsequential things, as two friends would at an airport terminal before one leaves on a long journey.

When I left, he said, "Don't worry. The prayers of my people will carry me through. And tell them the truth about the operation. Don't make a mystery of it."

When we had a reunion on

**FUTURE SAINTS** among the people of God in the Rochester diocese (at right) have a "local" symbol in Blessed John Nepomucene Neumann, CSSR (below). An Austro-Hungarian by birth, he was ordained for the Diocese of New York and assigned to Williamsville near Buffalo. En route there in 1836, he spent some time at St. Joseph's Church in Rochester during the first week of his priesthood. He was Bishop of Philadelphia from 1852 until 1860. Titled "Blessed" in 1963 by Pope Paul VI, he may someday be declared a Saint.



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Bishop Sheen's first public ceremony as Bishop was Bishop Kearney's last: Francis Cardinal Spellman and Bishop Kearney here escort Bishop Sheen to his throne-seat in Sacred Heart Cathedral, Dec. 15, 1966. In the background are Father John M. Merklinger, left, pastor of St. Alphonsus Church, Auburn, and Father James Moynihan, Chancellor.

his sixtieth anniversary of ordination, last September 19, I recalled the time I drove him to St. Mary's Hospital late one December evening. He was going to say Mass for the staff next morning, before visiting each patient in the hospital. Yet he was still up at 2:30 A.M., addressing Christmas cards! The night supervisor saw his light on, knocked, and gently advised him to go to bed.

The personal touch — that's the story of Bishop Kearney's life. He has a genuine concern for others. Thousands of letters and cards, written in that fine copperplate script of his, are treasured in many homes and rectories and convents around the diocese — reminders of a Bishop who has loved his people and is equally loved by them.

The Diocese of Rochester had five bishops in its first 98 years; three of them served the people for a long time; the regimes of two were short. Two of them made contributions to the national scene; all of them were true shepherds of their flocks.



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