

Happy Anniversary, Father!

On almost any day now this would be a fitting greeting to your priests, most of whom were ordained in June. And it would be a greeting much welcomed by all whether it was the first anniversary or the seventy-fifth. That is the unusual range of our Rochester celebrations this year, thanks to the good Lord Who has brought Monsignor George Eckl to the day of celebration of seventy-five years of priesthood. That has to be a unique record. And we have another proud boast in the diocese, for our beloved Bishop Kearney at 92 is the second oldest Bishop in the United States. The oldest is Archbishop Edward Howard of Portland, Oregon, who is alert at 97.

This year I will celebrate a liturgy of thanksgiving for the newly-ordained, for those in the Silver Jubilee class, for those of 40 years, and for Monsignor Eckl. I write these words today as a tribute to all of our priests who share with me the priestly presence of Christ as friend and servant to His people, and I beg your prayers for them. It is not an easy task and was never intended to be. For we are human, men taken from among men, and not a special breed a little less than the angels. Our genealogies are well known. We are born of human parentage with the traditional inheritance of heredity and environment, but called in a mysterious plan of divine election to a unique vocation despite our frailties.

Before all else, a priest is called to be a worshiper of God the Father. Through his ministry Christ's priesthood is present to the Church and to the shared priesthood of the faithful which is brought to its full exercise in the celebration of the Eucharist.

On the night that Christ celebrated the first

Eucharist, He revealed Himself in two startling roles as He ate a meal with His Apostles. First, He filled a basin with water, girded Himself with a towel, and washed the feet of His disciples. He made Himself the servant of all. Then, later on in the evening, He unfolded some of the deepest secrets of His heart and concluded with the words: "No longer do I call you servants, because the servant does not know what his master does. But I have called you friends, because all things that I have heard of My Father, I have made known to you."

It is as friend and servant of mankind that the priest of every age rises above every crisis of identity. His capacity for friendship and service reduces his likelihood of ever being wounded by loneliness and increases his power for promoting works of peace.

The Eucharist forever remains the central pre-occupation of the priesthood. Here the priest does what St. Paul insisted must be done: "Proclaim the Lord's death until He comes." (1 Cor. 11:26) His is a sacramental ministry that revolves around the bread of life and the cup of the new Covenant. It is around this central act of worship that the Church has built man's access to the life that is Christ, from the waters of Baptism, through the ashes of penance to the oil of the last anointing. In this process of life the priest plays a unique role that comes to focus each time he proclaims, "This is my Body which will be given up for you . . . This is the cup of my Blood."

Called to follow Jesus and sent to be a man for others, this is what priesthood has always meant at any time in history. But it seems much more difficult to be a priest today. Father Walter Burghardt, SJ, has remarked: "Today's priest must be incredibly open to new ideas, open to fresh ways of doing things, and open to a wider world. He must be uncommonly courageous; for he must face up to and live with deep doubts, or his own sense of inadequacy, or his loss of nerve, or his lowered standing in a community which once readily gave him a special status."

The ordination ceremony has been revised greatly today but it contains all the timeless expectations that people can demand of priests: that they be always disciples of one Master; that they preach Jesus and not themselves, that they live the life of the crucified Lord, that they always be apostles, spending themselves for others, that they fashion in fidelity a community of love, that their ceaseless striving to follow Jesus and to represent the Church will begin and end at the table of the Lord where not only bread and wine but all of us are transformed into Christ.

Most of us work hard to offer the friendship and service that entails involvement in the heartaches, fears, insecurities and prejudices of the human family. Most of us have the courage to denounce everything that is opposed to Gospel values which are meant to be revolutionary. Most of us are mystic enough to utter a blessing over our world despite its scars and ugliness, and to interpret the signs of our times as signs of hope.

The uplifted hands of a priest are a sacramental reminder that every human experience except sin can be imbued with Christ's redeeming and sanctifying love. His uplifted hands are a sign of the abundance of the good things we can give back to God — the warmth of human love, the wonder of conception, the loneliness of the human heart, the anguish of protest, the frustrations of youth, the patient resignation of the aged and the forgotten.

But uplifted hands can grow tired unless supported. The prayers of the community of faith provide that support. So when you say, 'Happy Anniversary, Father' please add, 'My prayers are with you always'. While you rightfully have your expectations of us as we strive to reach the ideal of Christ's priesthood, we rightfully reach out for your prayers, realizing full well that we, too, are but vessels of clay.

'Let Us Rebuild the City of God'

By MSGR. FRANCIS J. LALLY

No one, I suppose, is prepared to say just how much influence environment has on the life and development of the human species. We do know that the effects are so impressive that some people in our time, as in earlier times, have come to the conclusion that every human act is in fact a reaction, that it is literally determined by the world exterior to men, and man himself has next to no control over it.

Without accepting such an extreme position, we can acknowledge that we are mightily influenced by an external environment which subtly and often unconsciously conditions our total experience both in thought and action patterns. Among these environmental elements, one of major significance is housing or shelter.

When we speak of housing we do not refer merely to a situation in which one has, as we say, a roof over his head. Housing has to respond to human needs — and indeed should respond as well to human aspirations. We are accustomed to hear the experts speak of housing in terms of "units" — such and such a development consists of 300 housing units. This is intended to inform us, but in truth it tells us very little about the matter. It simply says that in the mind of the architect and the engineer 300 families can in some manner be accommodated in the project development. We, however, should be asking and demanding answers to very different questions. We must face the fact, even belatedly, that human housing is too important an endeavor to be left only to architects, engineers, planners and developers. If it is made for man and his family, housing should look to the whole range of human values which are involved in living, raising a family and enjoying a full life. Housing should not only support these values, it should enhance them and allow them the centrality they deserve in the human picture. Because we have seen in our country so much sub-standard housing — so many dwellings in urban and rural areas actually unfit for human habitation — we have come to accept replacement housing, often at government expense, which responds only to men's most basic needs and we have been satisfied with it. To be sure, it is often a step forward, and so we are inclined to settle for it. The slum dwelling family, living in a rat-infested firetrap is pleased to move to a fireproof housing development because in its precarious existence you settle for what you can get. This, alas, is the fatal flaw in much of our present housing plight. We are prepared to settle for what we can get, rather than demand what we need.

I have spent most of my adult years involved in some manner or other in urban problems, among them housing. I have now lived long enough to see what I think was well-planned developments move slowly

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into the state of the slums they were intended to replace. There are, of course, explanations — some of which we should have foreseen. In some cases, we added to the number of dwelling units, whether at the behest of the government or the developer, overcrowding resulted. In other cases, too little provision for management costs was allowed and the housing consequently deteriorated. In other circumstances tenant selection was not intelligent and we created our own nest of new problems. The list of mistakes made across the country has long since been documented, but we don't seem to learn very much as a result. I think the time has come when we stop letting the government and the developer, the city planner and the engineer make the decisions and start making them ourselves. We may not prove to be that much wiser, but we surely cannot do much worse than what has already happened.

It is at this point that housing planned under religious auspices offers us some real reason to hope for the future. We must assume that those motivated by spiritual factors will plan and erect housing that will be different from what has been built in many areas in times gone by. It may not look that much different but in ways that count, it ought to be different. This could reveal itself even in the size and design of the family unit. Does it respond to family needs concerning space and privacy? Just as overcrowding in the total density of a project courts disaster, so overcrowding in each unit can be a factor in family breakdown. When space is determined more by economic factors than human values, we are measuring with the wrong ruler. We can satisfy the banks and lending agencies and destroy the tenant, we can please the Federal agency and punish the resident family. There are also matters which touch upon health and security. A home must have light and air and still be safe against intrusion. Human dignity demands that element of freedom which relates man to the world about him and at the same time leaves him at ease, at peace and in safety. When home becomes a guarded cage, men become its first prisoners.

The world of nature was intended by God for all his people — not just the affluent, the suburban or the privileged. Housing should relate to nature in such a way that man himself feels part of what the Lord has created, not one who merely observes it, but one who uses and enjoys it. For young families this is not just a desideratum, it is a vital necessity. The human spirit cannot be sustained, especially among the young, if it

develops grotesquely in malformation and frustration. The world of nature liberates man, not merely biologically, but psychologically and spiritually as well.

There is a further element which should receive our concern, and while it may be difficult to describe, its presence is almost immediately discernable in the concrete human situation. We used to ask the question — What is it that makes a house a home? Certainly, many things enter into the alchemy — some of them cannot be built into housing, they must be brought in by those who are housed. But, all the same, there is an environment that encourages pride in one's surroundings, self-respect and respect for others, a certain sense of belonging, and a feeling of satisfaction and peace. This may seem to be an elusive thing that depends more on man than his environment, but environment very often sets the appropriate milieu in which it lives and thrives. This suggests that housing is not something we build and occupy and then we pass on to other works. A critical element is the management of good housing and when this reflects the human and spiritual values of which we speak, the housing involved has already become for many their true home. After all, this is what we should be building for America — not housing units, not highrise or lowrise, not cottage or duplex — we should be building homes for the American citizen and the American family.

Finally, I must mention what is called in the trade "tenant selection." This process, we know from experience, does not always follow principles that are either equitable or acceptable. Housing sponsored by religious groups can give leadership and example here. Some might suppose that occupants should reflect the character of the sponsoring agency. I would like to propose a different criterion — one which I mentioned earlier. Selection should respond to human need. My neighbor is the one who needs me, the Gospel tells us. Housing, and especially government-assisted housing, should assist the young family, the handicapped, the elderly and the lonely; it should cross social, ethnic and religious barriers; it should be a mirror of the community in which it exists; it should be, and it should appear to be, fair housing for all.

We should remind ourselves, I suppose, that housing, even good housing, will not answer all our problems. Many of our social anxieties come out of the human character and will not be removed until that character is further reformed. Here we find the Church and the religious community in a sponsor role more ancient than that of housing, more essential to its mission, and one in which it has long experience. Let us, by all means, rebuild the city of man and all its institutions to his service; let us continue, however, to rebuild the City of God; without which that other city, however glorious, will remain forever vain and empty.

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