

Pastoral Perspective

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

Anniversary Greetings to Our Priests

June is the month of the anniversary of the ordination of most of the priests of our diocese. I dedicate this column to all of them in gratitude for their years of faithful ministry to the Church of Rochester and for their loyal support as my co-workers. I have already celebrated at St. Andrew's Church with the nine Silver Jubilarians ordained in 1953. I shall send special greetings to twelve who have served for thirty-five years, to seven who have served forty years, to two who will mark their Golden Jubilee, Father Edward Hartmann and Father Charles Reynolds. I shall be privileged to celebrate with the seven newly ordained as they receive their first assignments, and with the eight members of the Class of 1968 and with Monsignor Leo Schwab who is celebrating his 60th anniversary.



As I write these words of tribute to all of our priests who share with me the priestly presence of Christ as friend and servant to His people, I beg your prayers for them. Ours is not an easy task and it 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

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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 preoccupation 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, S.J. 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.

God's Goodness Will Prevail

Following is the text of the address given by the Holy Father on May 17.

It is necessary to think, in fact to have second thoughts. We are in a historic moment in which the situation of society is evolving, changing, presenting new problems, new difficulties and new possibilities.



The external scene of life has a great repercussion on our spirits. The tragedy of the Honorable Aldo Moro, and of his employees has deeply upset us. Its conclusion makes us reflect sadly on this event, as on a crisis, the epilogue of which has not yet solved the problems that it raises, although new aspects of the unhappy drama open up before us as signs of better news.

But how many facts there are which disturb the forecasts conceived of the world, dreamed of in order, justice and peace, and yet afflicted by unacceptable laws, by conflicts never placated, by questions that progress itself brings up and aggravates. A sense of pessimism comes and suffocates so many serene hopes and shakes our confidence in the goodness of mankind. Ours is a painful and dangerous reflection because it drains confidence in the future of a just and happy world

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Here, then, the course of our possible pessimism must stop. We will carry out this operation of recovering our due optimism by means of some fundamental thoughts. These we must draw from our religious awareness, without detriment to those we may derive from our reason and our experience also.

We must seek the first comforting thought in the existence and goodness of God. He leaves to human vicissitudes the sinister developments, that may derive from the capricious, unstable and fallible freedom, which the economy of the superior government of the world grants to that tiny, but terrible being, called man. The latter, because of his shortcomings or because of his malice, (with the complicity of another mysterious and evil being, the devil!) can upset the ideal and regular development of man's own activity. But this disorder does not immobilize the hand of God, who can intervene and can draw new good from the evil caused by the wickedness of his creature. In fact this operation of restoring order is another great effect of divine presence on the human scene, a presence which can

draw positive effects from every human situation. Let us recall St. Paul, who assures us that "God works for good with those who love him."

One of the arts of divine Providence in our regard is precisely that of making us find treasures of salvation in the very experience of certain evils which cause suffering in our lives. Here let us recall the immensely consoling, innovating words of Christ himself: "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." They are re-echoed by another expression of the Divine Master, concerning the tribulations of the last period of history: "By your endurance you will gain your lives."

There is in human suffering a certainty which should ease it and make it tolerable. It is that suffering is not useless: it is connected with a reward which made St. Francis of Assisi, though afflicted by his stigmata, say: "So great is the joy which I await, that all suffering is dear to me." Among the great marvels effected by Christianity there also is that of having taught people to suffer patiently and to discover treasures of humanity and grace in pain and misfortune.

Therefore our second thoughts lead us back to optimism. It is not only an intellectual thesis, but it is also that view of life, or rather that experience, which gives greatness, and not illusory comfort, to those who put Christianity into practice in their lives and succeed in finding in the cross the wisdom and energy that our poor but heroic existence needs.