

Editorial & Opinion

Bishop Clark reflects on highlights of 'ad limina' journey

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private chapel to celebrate the eucharistic liturgy with him. When we were shown into the chapel at 6:45 a.m., he was kneeling in prayer. Quite by chance, I ended up about four feet from his side and enjoyed deeply the quiet of the place and the prayer of the people gathered there.

At 7 a.m. he vested and began the celebration by welcoming those who had gathered and by offering a short reflection on the centrality of the Eucharist in Catholic life.

Sister Patrice, the newly appointed chancellor of the Diocese of Grand Rapids, Mich., proclaimed the first reading, and Bishop Edward Egan from the Archdiocese of New York proclaimed the Gospel. There was no homily, but under the wonderful leadership of Father Don King, a member of the staff of the North American College, our small congregation did a lot of singing throughout the liturgy. For the Eucharistic prayer, I was invited with three other bishops — once again by chance — to take a place at the altar with John Paul II.

To be so close to the pope in moments both of private prayer and public liturgical prayer was a great thrill. There is, after all, something special about the office — its connections with the vitality of our tradition and with the local Churches that make up our communion of faith. In the Eucharist, all that comes together in a particularly deep way. And I especially felt that quality as I prayed for you, for the growth in faith of our whole diocese.

There is also something special about the man who holds the office. He is deeply recollected in his prayer, and I had the sense that the liturgy is especially important to him. Above all, John Paul II impressed me as a person who knows the need for the nourishment the Eucharist gives. Better than anyone else, I suppose, he knows that a man who becomes the pope is still a man, although one with responsibilities greater than those most persons are asked to bear.

When the liturgy ended, we all remained for some moments of prayer. John Paul II rose and went outside the chapel door, where he offered each of us a sign of peace. Then we gathered in an adjacent room where the pope greeted each of us and offered each of us the gift of a rosary. As he has always done anytime I have met him, he remembered that he had ordained me a bishop and welcomed me back to Rome.

On Saturday, we had three other kinds of meetings with John Paul II. My turn for a private meeting with him came at noon that day. We spoke together for about 15 minutes, and a most pleasant time it was. It seemed much less structured than my last visit and, therefore, less formal. He greeted me very kindly and recalled that this was my second *ad limina* visit. He spoke about ordaining the 26 of us in May of 1979, and mentioned that it was the largest group of bishops he had ever ordained.

I wished him a happy anniversary and offered him your loving greetings and prayers. I spoke of you and of the faith and generosity that characterizes the people of the Diocese of Rochester. As part of those comments, I thanked him for the ways he supports the life of local Churches and the manner in which he has supported me and other diocesan bishops. I had the chance to express my conviction that such support is especially important in view of the rapid cultural changes we experience and the need we face to be creative and free in the way in which we proclaim the Gospel.

We spoke of such cultural changes and the way in which they affect family life and the youth of our country, in whom the pope takes such great interest. I was able to tell him what I tell our young people — that they are beautiful, gifted people, and that we are blessed to have them.

I thanked the pope for the opportunity I have to

Along the Way



study Spanish and told him of the special relationship we have with the Diocese of Tabasco, Mexico. The pope was quite interested in that relationship and remembered that Bishop Rafael Garcia Gonzales of Tabasco had been in Rome to visit with the pope last month.

At the conclusion of our conversation he asked me to convey his love and blessing to you. When we had finished, Bishop Hickey came in to greet the pope, and some photos were taken of each of us with John Paul II and of the three of us together.

At that point, we were joined by all the bishops in our group to hear a more formal talk by John Paul II. Cardinal John O'Connor of New York greeted the pope for all of us, and made brief mention of some of the pastoral concerns and opportunities before us.

The pope chose to address the importance of Catholic higher education, the significance of theological study and the responsibility of those who engage in theological enterprise. Next came an opportunity to have lunch with the pope for those who had not shared a similar opportunity on Thursday. Ten of us joined him and his two aides for a most enjoyable luncheon — I should say dinner in view of the fact that John Paul II observes the Italian custom of taking the principal meal at midday.

We spoke of many things in a free-flowing, informal conversation. The local Church, women in the Church, recent apparitions of Mary, the pope's 10th anniversary, our presidential campaign, campus ministry in our country and the pope's impression of life in the United States are a few of the topics I remember.

As we finished the meal, John Paul autographed for me a copy of *On the Dignity of Women*, his recent letter on women. With that and a prayer of thanksgiving in his chapel, our visit with the pope concluded.

Meetings with the Roman Curia

From Tuesday through Friday, we met with 12 of the congregations, secretariats and councils that — along with others — make up the Roman Curia. Those

we visited deal with religious and secular institutes, doctrine of the faith, Christian unity, non-Christian religions, social communications, laity, clergy, bishops, education, sacraments and worship, family, and justice and peace.

Our visits averaged an hour in length. They were largely unstructured, but generally provided enjoyable opportunities for discussion and questions in the individual agencies' area of interest and competence.

It would be impossible here to go through the discussion that took place at each meeting. I found them interesting because they acquainted us further with the procedures of each agency and were a way of being in touch with the great variety of the local Churches and with the broad range of complex issues with which the Holy See must deal day in and day out.

I also found that the sessions raised questions in my mind about how best we deal in the contemporary Church with the natural and centuries-old tension that exists when a great number of particular Churches form a universal communion.

How do we know the dignity and integrity, appropriate autonomy and freedom of the local Church, and at the same time respect as we want to and must the fact that we are part of universal communion, the human visible sign of whose unity is the Bishop of Rome? Most people I know agree that in the years just prior to Vatican Council II the balance between those two poles had shifted markedly to the central authority of the universal Church. And I believe that most would agree that the council gave strong impetus to a renewal of our appreciation of the local Churches. Our visits to the Vatican bureaus left me convinced that we have not yet arrived at a lived appreciation of that tension in a manner that is stable and lasting, and that the work will require the patience and understanding of all of us.

Some closing reflections

Part of the joy of the week was the company of Bishop Hickey. Before we left, he mentioned several times how much he looked forward to walking in Rome. Each time I said that I'd love to walk with him, only to have him tell me in his gentle way that I might walk too fast for him. Eight days later I am exhausted from trying to keep up with him. The man is indefatigable. He may be the first person to climb four times in one day the formidable hill that leads to the North American College.

From time to time in Rochester, I remembered to give thanks for my experience in Rome, for what I learned there about the Church, friendships, faith, God and myself. It was such a joy this week in Rome to remember and give thanks for my experience in Rochester and for what that experience has taught me about the same important themes. The lessons of each place were different, but I see them both as very distinct gifts from a gracious God who, I deeply trust, has not stopped teaching me.

It is in that spirit that I look forward to my sabbatical experience in Cuernavaca, Mexico. I am anxious to continue learning — not only Spanish, but all of the things that we can learn when we are in a new environment. I look forward to experiencing the life of the Church of Cuernavaca, to thinking and praying, to remembering God's good gifts to me though the years, to thinking about the way I shall try to serve in your midst when I return.

I will be leaving for Mexico on Thursday, Oct. 20, and will be there until Holy Week, save for some time back at home during the Christmas season. I won't be doing a regular column while I am gone, but I do hope to write to you occasionally about my experiences during the coming months. I do ask for your prayers through it all, and I do promise you my own. Peace to all.

Letters

Disputes description of counselors' activity in recent crusade story

To the editor:

In response to the front-cover article entitled "Crusade prompts record participation by Catholics" and published on September 15, we as counselors do not work to "determine their (inquirers') denomination and the nearest church of that denomination" as Rob Cullivan

states.

Information is taken in regards to religious background or denomination; however, our main concern is to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with them and to get them started in Bible study and regular prayer so they can continue to grow spiritually.

We encourage these new and rededicated Christians by starting with the Gospel of John, to do the written studies and to memorize the Scripture verses related to each lesson.

We are concerned that the new or rededicated Christian be nurtured and become active for Christ and attend church regularly.

Let us remember that (the Rev. Billy) Graham is proclaiming salvation for sinners through the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. The only "numbers" of real significance are those that received Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior, and not by "reciting

a pledge to follow Jesus" but as the Word of God says: "by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8). The inquirer invites Jesus into his/her heart in response to acknowledging their sin.

As for "record participation," could we please be informed as to how many Catholics accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior?

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Unfortunately we can't oblige Ms. Markus, because the Graham staff refuses to reveal the figures — and has encouraged the diocese to do likewise — for fear, I gather, of causing rivalries between participating denominations. When I first heard that rationale, I thought it was foolishness; now I'm not so sure.

Writer anticipates weekly columnist's 'liberal sophistry'

To the editor:

I look for it, and am never disappointed — the slimy, liberal sophistry in Richard McBrien's column.

It is sacrilege for McBrien to be considered a priest of Jesus Christ — the greatest truth-teller of all time, whose straightforward integrity of utterance is an inspiration to all. The truth will out, but not in McBrien's column.

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