

Support

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new friends worth their weight in gold in the years to come. My vocation matured in St. Bernard's into an all but undeniable imperative.

The daily routine from 5:30 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. of alternating prayer, classes, study and recreation; the splendid Sunday liturgies of Mass and vespers; the untiring exploration of philosophy, theology and the sacred Scriptures, along with the history of the Church and its immortal Doctors—all this admirable *iculum vitae* fulfilled for us seminarians the word of Proverbs, chapter 9:

*Wisdom had built her house,
she has set up her seven columns;
She has dressed her mean, mixed
her wine,
yes, has spread her table.*

One must note fairly, however, that it was not all roses. Every vocation has its growing pains. I had mine, sometimes quite intensely, and at one dark interval I was tempted to give it all up. But here again the watchful Lord reached out as "my heart grew faint, and He sat me high upon a rock." His helper for me was a deacon, five years my senior, who took me in hand with wisdom and tact and, best of all, compassion. To him most of all, I think I owe the saving of my vocation. Yet this service to me, as well as to some other seminarians, exacted its toll from him, a frightening seige of nervous exhaustion from which, thanks be to God, he re-

covered enough to be ordained a priest, and then served well for 11 years until he died suddenly of a heart attack, returning form his confession at St. Joseph's on a Saturday morning.

Finally the 11-year course of seminary formation came to a close, with all its trials and hesitations, but through it all much joy. There came a thrilling moment a few weeks before, when we deacons saw our names posted on the bulletin board as "called" by the bishop to be ordained. The date was set: **June 8, 1929.**

So then it was that the whole student body went in the Lake Avenue streetcars to our St. Patrick's Cathedral on Platt St. to witness and pray for us five Rochester deacons who would soon be "priested." With myself there were Thomas Brennan, Stanislaus Krolak, Gerald Lambert and Beecher Sullivan. When each of us heard our name called out by the seminary rector, we answered *adsum* in Latin which says, "Here I Am," and then grouped in front of the bishop. We were John Francis O'Hern's first ordination class, for he had been ordained just three months before as the third Bishop of Rochester.

It was only with that call and our response that we could be sure of our vocation. These words were the sign and affirmation of everything that had been growing and maturing in each of us from boyhood and manhood until our age of 24. So, then, one by one, we knelt before the bishop to submit our heads to his ordaining hands—in a precious moment beyond time, Christ Himself investing us from the fullness of His Holy Priesthood.

Our hands were anointed with the perfumed chrism, and the sacred vessels were presented to us. Thus vested and signed, we concelebrated with the bishop—our first Mass. It was an amazing reality, that we were now *alter Christus*, Christ Himself in our persons saying and doing what He said and did at the Last Supper, each of us with the bishop at the altar.

An incredible, ineffable fulfillment of a vocation's long journey! It was too late now to protest with Jeremiah that "I am too young," or to seek escape with Isaiah from the enveloping cloud of divinity! How had we climbed that Tabor height? Yet we were not to stay on this summit, as Peter was minded to, saying "Lord, it is good for us to be here." With Peter we must let the Lord bring us down the mountain to the prosaic turmoil of human need.

For perseverance and courage on the priestly road we were entering, we had surely to cling to Jesus' word: "You have not chosen me, I have chosen you." That road was to be for me 60 years long, with I don't know how many more. It has been an astonishing journey to many places and countless people, all in the Lord's name; whether as parish priest, ministering Mass and sacraments, preaching and catechizing, healing and counselling; or as teacher of Scripture and liturgy all of which I'd be willing to do over again, given new youth and energy.

The secret is an inner rapture, a joy, for which the psalmist gives praise to God "who gives joy to my youth." Youth indeed, not calculated in number of years, but lasting by God's grace fresh and green

into old age!

To bring this meandering account to an end, I turn to an American poet, Edgar Lee Masters, who in his moving *Spoon River Anthology* gives us a grand poem about a Catholic priest. All the poems are about people in the Spoon River cemetery, the Protestant burying ground. But in this poem he eulogizes one of the dead he remembers over in the Catholic cemetery. The poem is entitled "Father Malloy," and this is what he writes:

*You are over there, Father Malloy,
Where holy ground is, and the cross
marks every grave,
Not here with us on the hill—
Us of wavering faith, and
clouded vision,
And drifting hope, and
unforgiven sins.
You were so human, Father Malloy,
Taking a friendly glass sometimes
with us,
Siding with us who would rescue
Spoon River
From the coldness and the dreariness
of village morality...
Some of us almost came to you,
Father Malloy,
Seeing how your Church had divined
the heart,
And provided for it
Through Peter the Flame,
Peter the Rock.*

(From *Spoon River Anthology*,
Macmillan Publishing Co.
New York, N.Y., 1916

Even in this non-Catholic voice witness is given to the mysterious christening the presence of a priest radiates among the people. He is a Jacob's Ladder, bearing in himself the two-directional traffic between Heaven and earth, carrying up the prayers and oblations of the people, and bringing down the blessings and mercies of God.

In faith the Catholic people must trust that God continues to send His priestly call to many young men. We are given dramatic reports about crowded seminaries in Africa and the Far East. As for our own drought of vocations we may only conjecture. Either God's call is these days being drowned out by the din and tumult of "the world that is too much with us," with its rock subculture and television pollution, that God may be rationing His calls more meagerly as a judgment upon our prodigal indulgence in the glut of today's consumer world.

Our hope? Only when our parishes, everywhere, turn once more into fruitful oases of prayer—with fervent liturgies, devoted families, faithful works of mercy, love of the poor, and missionary spirit—only then may we justly hope to see a new greening of priestly and religious vocations.

Meanwhile and always we must pray constantly that the Lord of the harvest "send laborers into His vineyard;" and give strength to our prayers by the good example of a devout life.

Knights set field Mass

Bishop Dennis W. Hickey will celebrate the annual field Mass of the Knights of St. John on Sunday, June 25, at 10 a.m. in Holy Sepulchre Cemetery, Rochester.

The Mass will take place in front of the chapel on the east side of Lake Avenue. Immediately following the Mass, Bishop Hickey will bless the Holy Family statue and burial plot.

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