

Events inspire look behind, ahead

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

Last Sunday was a special day for me. Two events made it so. One was the celebration at St. Paul's, Webster, of the 50th anniversary of Father John "Knobby" Walsh's ordination to the ministerial priesthood. The second was a youth rally, which brought to the campus of Keuka College some 500 sixth-, seventh- and eighth-grade boys and girls from all parts of our diocese.

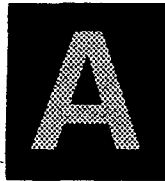
I know without a shadow of a doubt that I would have enjoyed each celebration immensely if either had been the only event on Sunday's calendar. Both celebrations were that joyful, that life-giving, that filled with hope.

But the day held a particular blessing for me in the combination of the two events and what they symbolized for me.

Let me explain. I have always admired priests like Knobby Walsh because they have a lively spirit, a warm curiosity about life and an obvious reverence for the people for whose service they were ordained. People like to be with them because they treat people with respect, and because they are as ready to learn from their people as they are willing to teach them.

When dispositions like that describe the relationships between priests and the people, one inevitably finds a community in which those who participate do so with enthusiasm and a notable sense of freedom.

In such an environment, people have a sense that they are growing together. For that reason, daily problems are seen more



LONG THE WAY

as opportunities for growth, rather than as obstacles to it. Tomorrow and its challenges are seen as an adventure to which God calls us, not as a threat to today's values and virtues.

It's that openness to tomorrow and affectionate service with and for others that I have always admired in Knobby and others like him. Such individuals give me a sense of optimism about tomorrow and remind me of the importance of staying alive to its possibilities. They remind me that no matter the number of our years, we are God's children called each day to become more and more like Christ.

If Knobby reminded me of our common and continual call to new life in one way, the young people gathered at Keuka College did it in quite another. They did so by their energy, their openness to one another, their beautiful spirituality, their curious minds and their

willingness to share their growth and searching with the rest of us.

Our eucharistic liturgy together was a joy to me. I found myself wishing during the celebration that you could have been there to experience their faith and genuine sense of joy in each other's company.

I also wished you had been there to help me field the wide range of questions they developed through the day. Some of those questions dealt with issues of great substance: faith, church regulations, women in the church, human sexuality, the nature of God, the question of sin and evil in the world. Other questions were more personal: How do you become a bishop? Is it difficult? Do you like it? Did you ever date? What's your confirmation name?

After the Mass and two 40-minute question-and-answer sessions with the kids, I stayed for the closing prayer service, which had been developed and was led by the young people. It was during that moment of prayer that I began to make explicit connections between the afternoon with the kids and the earlier gathering with Knobby and the people of St. Paul's.

I guess the best way to say it is that in the afternoon the kids reminded me in a beautiful way of what I have been and of growth over the years. In the morning Knobby reminded me of what I would like to become before it's all finished, of our call and capacity to grow every day we live.

My thanks to Knobby and the kids for the wonderful gifts they gave me on Sunday.

Peace to all.

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