

Ceremony in home church cause for thanks

It was a joy to participate in a prayer service at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Albany on Sunday, as that wonderful diocese began a year-long celebration of its 150th anniversary.

People gathered in great joy from all parts of the Albany diocese. The music was splendid. The readings from Scripture and excerpts from the preaching and writing of figures prominent in the diocese's history were moving. Bishop Howard Hubbard's homily was just perfect in the way it drew together the rich streams of the celebration and invited all of us to reflect on the joy and the challenge that life in the church so often is for all of us.

You may know that it was in that local church where I was baptized into the faith and that it was for its service that I was ordained a priest. For those reasons, for reasons of family ties and cherished friendships, I found the experience of being at the cathedral yesterday to be an especially gratifying one.

In that company gathered in that place for that occasion I had a privileged moment to do myself what I have invited you to do during this Advent season, i.e., to remember the wonderful works God has already done among us so that we can prepare well to embrace lovingly all that is yet to be.

That celebration pushed me to continue thinking about what the future will be like

along the way

BY BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK



for our local church. As you know, we have been working very hard through our Synod process to name and live out as best we can those priorities we judge to be of greatest importance for the life of our diocese.

And, you are aware that we are now seriously exploring supporting strategies by which we can deepen our ability to live out those priorities in healthy and fruitful ways.

In addition to those efforts — indeed, to ensure that we will deal with priorities and planning out of our deepest values — I have called all of our communities to a serious reflection on the privileged, central place that our Sunday celebration of the Eucharistic Liturgy holds in Catholic life.

You know and I know that this is not easy work. It demands a lot of faith and personal investment. Without them there is little hope that we will do the careful study, the honest sharing, the respectful listening and careful negotiation that are always necessary if we are to bring the very best we

have to offer in response to the real challenges of life.

What gives me strength for the journey is the memory of how our mothers and fathers in faith responded when they were faced with problems at least as great as the ones before us today. Through successive stages of our own diocesan history, these gallant men and women coped with anti-Catholic bigotry, deep antagonism against immigrants, depression, war, terrible poverty and other realities that must surely have tested their spirits and strained their resources.

Yet they passed on to us not only the treasure of our faith but a vast array of institutions and services that have shaped Catholic life and served the people of this region for all 128 years of our existence.

Given that remarkable legacy and given the material and spiritual resources with which the Lord has blessed us, I have every confidence that we will respond to today's challenges with the same courage and creativity our mothers and fathers brought to the challenges of their time.

I hope, as we come closer to the Christmas feast, that you have been able to stop and listen and think and pray and talk with people you love of things about which you truly care. And if you have not as yet managed that, do not be discouraged. Tomorrow can be a brand new day.

Peace to all.

A reminder to our readers: The Catholic Courier will not publish during Christmas and New Year's weeks.

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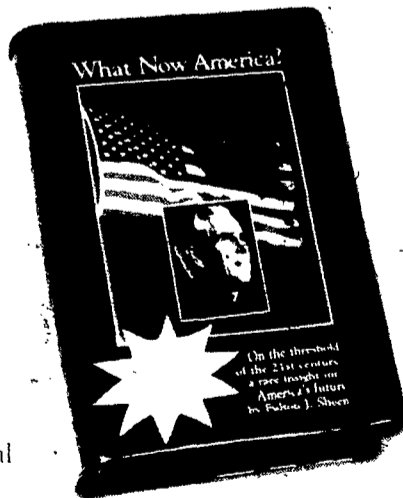
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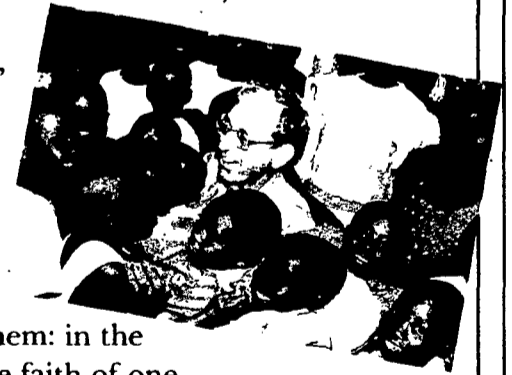
Would you think these little refugees from Rwanda could smile?

Half the children in their refugee camp in Tanzania have seen a family member killed.

Yet for each daily Mass, 1,000 adults and children gather. In the midst of fear and grief, they know

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#344 12/12/96