

Celebrations help one focus on life's direction

On the same weekend, Sept. 7 and 8, on which I installed Deborah Housel as parish administrator of St. Michael's in Lyons, I visited two other of our parishes — and for two very different reasons.

The first parish was St. John of Rochester in Perinton. At the noon liturgy on Sunday we blessed their new baptismal font and baptized by immersion Annelise Mary, daughter of David and Stacy Ann Rappold. Following the liturgy, the community enjoyed a picnic meal on the parish grounds.

Seven hours later I was at St. Michael's in Rochester for a Eucharistic Liturgy of Remembrance and Hope in honor of those who lost their lives in the tragic events of Sept. 11, 2001. In addition to our host community, there were gathered a church full of Rochester area firefighters, law-enforcement personnel, emergency medical technicians and representatives of the Salvation Army and Red Cross.

I would have been left with much to pray and think about had I participated in only one of those liturgies on that Sunday. But I still feel the impact (is grace the better word?) of being a part of both.

I guess that's because the two, taken together, framed life in a way that spoke deeply to me. Even these many days later, I still find the events of that Sunday to be a source of prayer and an invitation to

along the way

BY BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK



reflect on our faith. Let me try to share some of that prayer and thinking in the following points:

1) Life is a gift from God for which we should daily give thanks. Put differently, none of us owns tomorrow or has any guarantee that tomorrow will be exactly as we hope or expect. Yes, we should plan and prepare; we should carry out our responsibilities to others to the best of our abilities. But, always and everywhere, we are coming to a healthier freedom when we remember that all good gifts come from God and we are but their stewards.

2) Vulnerability is an inseparable part of human existence. Neither wealth nor power nor influence nor prestige can save us from experiencing illness or accident. Much less can they preserve us from death. Some of the most powerful people I have ever met are individuals who recognize their vulnerability to pain and suffer-

ing. They keep a peaceful spirit in the midst of it all. More — their focus is on the concerns and needs of others, not on their own.

3) Life is richer when we are part of a community. It was a beautiful thing to note the joy among the people of St. John of Rochester as they participated in the baptism of little Annelise Mary. No less was it a joy to realize how much strength the people at St. Michael's brought to one another.

4) The Medicare card in my wallet is among the many daily reminders I have that I am much closer to the end of my life than to its beginning. Last Sunday's events, which touched both life's first moments and its last, helped me to be in touch with how I'd like to focus my energies for the rest of my days. They also drew me to think about the values I would like to honor in all that I say and do.

You may be older than I am. You may be younger. Whatever your age, I invite you to think about the themes I raise here — in any way that the Lord would lead you to do that.

Do you rest peacefully with the direction of your life and with the values that guide your daily decisions? Or, would you like to do some work on them? Either way, you can count on the Lord's love for you and the prayer of the community.

Peace to all.

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