

Retreat brings blessings into focus

I am writing these words Sept. 3 at Eastern Point Retreat House in Gloucester, Massachusetts. Forty-eight of us are in the final hours of a retreat that began last Tuesday evening, Aug. 26.

These days of prayer have been a precious gift to me. I have a sense that the experiences of other retreatants have been like my own. There is quiet and peace here, and the wonderful realization that we are supported by the prayers of one another and by the prayers of friends at home.

The great gift of retreat for me is the freedom it offers from the structures, rhythms, demands and complexities of daily living. In fact, in the early days of the retreat, I had difficulty leaving all of that behind



Bishop Matthew H. Clark

Along the Way

so I could be attentive to what the Lord wanted to say to me in the depth of my heart. I am grateful to my retreat guide, Jesuit Father Jim Keegan, for many kind favors, including his encouragement to be patient with the inertia that kept my in-

nards churning. He invited me to let the light of Christ shine on the jumble, to loosen my grip and let the Lord lead the way.

Gradually, the inner clamor abated somewhat, and I found myself able to be quiet, to listen, to savor the personal love the Lord has for me and each one of us. One of the fruits of that experience was a renewed sense of confidence in the faithful, compassionate love Christ always holds out to us — even when we know ourselves to have been less than generous in responding to that gift, even when we have rejected it.

Another wonderful blessing of the days was the renewed perspective they offered on my life and ministry among you. Freedom from daily demands sheds a beautiful light on the blessings of the years. And, I thought of and expressed gratitude as best I could for all the women and men, boys and girls who by their faith, generosity and goodness have taught me so much about the goodness and mercy of our God in my years as your bishop.

I must name, too, another gracious gift given to me on retreat. That was to look back on some of the tough, even painful, experiences of the years. I mean the public controversies, the painful moments few know about, the hard decisions, the failures I have experienced, and the ways in which my own sin and selfishness have caused pain for others. I cannot say it was fun to revisit those moments, but even those memories were graced by the consoling realization that God was there

in them all — that our limitations and sin do not constrict our God. In this context I can say again what I have said often about my years as bishop: I wouldn't trade a moment of it, but there are many moments I never want to repeat.

Our closing liturgy will begin in 20 minutes. It's time to leave this chair, which affords a spectacular view of sunlit Gloucester Harbor, and to move to that event. Then it will be time to go home.

While it is difficult to leave this privileged place and blessed experience, I am deeply eager to go home. This retreat has helped me to a fresh sense of the richness of home — life among you as together we try to be faithful disciples of the Lord.

Yes, there are problems. I am aware that this edition of the *Catholic Courier* is dated Sept. 11, a date laden with reminders of the strife and agony that torments the human family. But, even if that horrible event had never happened, we would still be aware of the violence, addiction, racism, apathy, bitterness, poverty and disregard for life that plague us. The human family desperately needs the reconciliation and peace that only God can bring.

If we look at all of these realities apart from God, they crush and depress. If we remember and root ourselves in faith in God, all things are possible and we are privileged to be part of his healing, reconciling, nourishing love. Can we but offer our few loaves and fish?

Thanks for your prayers and support for my retreat.
Peace to all.

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