

First bishop offered much to diocese

I almost always consult the ordo, or church calendar, before celebrating the Eucharist. I want to be sure of the texts and any special features of the day. And, I like to see which, if any, of the priests of our diocese died on that date. It has been my custom to pray in thanksgiving for their ministry to the people of our diocese and to pray for them and their families.

Last Sunday, Jan. 18, the ordo reminded me that on that date in 1909, the founding bishop of the Diocese of Rochester, Bernard J. McQuaid, went home to God. At the time of his death, he had served as our bishop for 41 years.

Bishop McQuaid's tenure was an extraordinary one not just in terms of length of tenure but in achievement. With his leadership, the people of this diocese accomplished remarkable things in education, in service to the poor and vulnerable,



Bishop Matthew H. Clark

Along the Way

in health care, and in forging a place for Catholics in a cultural environment that frequently was inimical to their presence.

The reading I have done about Bishop McQuaid indicates that his presence was felt far beyond the borders of our diocese. He was a person who spoke his mind, and he was involved more than once in national controversies. The most widely reported one was with Archbishop John Ireland of Minneapolis-St. Paul, with whom he disagreed on how best to strengthen and support Catholic life and identity in a plural-

istic society.

Nor did the controversies in which our founding bishop was involved end at our borders. With his confreres of that age, he continually engaged in vigorous conversations with the Holy See about how best to guide a burgeoning but relatively new church in a dynamic and challenging new republic.

It won't surprise you given all of the above that our father and friend, Bernard did not live a care-free life. Indeed, I often have said to friends over the years that whenever I am feeling sorry for myself because of a tough time, I open a biography of Bishop McQuaid, read of his concerns and then fall asleep in peace.

I write a bit about Bishop McQuaid for whom I did pray on Sunday and of whom I have thought a good deal since. But, I have mentioned him primarily to say that I have prayed a good deal this week for you and for myself, in that we are all in a real way his spiritual descendants. We are beneficiaries of many of the decisions and good

works he and that first diocesan community effected.

In that prayer I also thanked God for the faith and strength of our present-day diocesan community. We are richly blessed in many ways, not the least of which is in your willingness to deal honestly and generously with the pastoral challenges of the day. It leaves me with the confident sense that we receive the gifts offered by our mothers and fathers in faith not as museum pieces but as organic elements that help us to grow in and express our faith in a context much different from theirs.

All of that requires openness to the new and a willingness at times to let go of the familiar and comfortable. I think it is safe to say that that is never easy for any of us. But I am convinced that our earliest diocesan community had no monopoly on qualities like courage and creativity. My experience tells me that God has given those gifts to you in generous measure. For that reason I am convinced that we can be confident about our future.

Peace to all.

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Catholic Courier (USPS 135-580)
Vol. 115 No. 15 January 22, 2004

Published weekly except the first Thursday in January and the last Thursday in December. Subscription rates: single copy, 75¢; one-year subscription in U.S., \$20.00; Canada and foreign \$20.00 plus postage. Offices: 1136 Buffalo Road, Rochester, NY 14624, 585/529-9530. Periodicals postage paid at Rochester, NY.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Catholic Courier, PO Box 24379, Rochester, NY 14624.



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