

Priestly ministry like 'falling in love'

"Today I am given to you by God that I may serve you, and together we might serve Him." This is the quote I used on the front of my ordination invitation last June. It is something that I have tried to remind myself of daily throughout this first year of ordained ministry.

Having just celebrated my first Easter Triduum a few weeks ago, the death and resurrection of Christ is what resonates within me as I reflect upon my first year of priesthood. It has been a year of extreme joys and sorrows, intense highs and lows. As I write this, I have an overall sense of peace and joy in being a priest.

A few close family members and friends died this past year. My mother died two months before my priesthood ordination. My grandmother died last July. A very dear friend from Washington, D.C., died in October, and my uncle died in December. It has been a year of significant losses that plunged me into the depths of sorrow and mourning. I miss all of them deeply. Each one of them was a part of my life in their own unique and wonderful way.

I have also experienced the loss of my close friends in the seminary. Because we lived together every day for almost four years, we grew very close and I miss them now that I am ordained and we are not together on a daily basis. It was a loss to me to not have such a close support network in this first year of priesthood.

I have also experienced so many joys and blessings this year. I am assigned to St. Mary's in Canandaigua, St. Felix in Clifton Springs and St. Francis in Phelps. So, I am putting many miles on my car this year. But I am enjoying meeting so many people and experiencing the lives of so many different people in these three communities. The resurrection and new life that these communities bring to my life gives me great joy.

I have been blessed to celebrate significant moments with these people — births, first Communions, confirmations, marriages, deaths. I have been present with them to celebrate their joys and sorrows, the totality of their lives, and it humbles me. In these moments, God becomes clearer, more tangible, taking on flesh in these people and becoming sacrament for me. They help me grow closer to God and to fall more deeply in love with them.

One experience that I recall so vividly is with a woman who was dying of cancer. I had been asked by a friend of hers to visit her. She was not Catholic but she desired to become part of the church. In our visits, I was able to see God more clearly



File photo
A senior priest greets Father Mark Brewer following his June 14, 2003, ordination at Sacred Heart Cathedral.

ly in a woman who desired so deeply to be joined more closely with God. I was able to celebrate the sacrament of baptism and the sacrament of the sick with her. I was impressed with the great faith that she had. It was planted by God and was nurtured all of her life by the many friends that surrounded her on her deathbed. At her death, I knew she was ready to meet her God because of all the love that was surrounding her at that point. There must have been 40 to 50 of her family and closest friends present to birth her into her new life. That is an experience that will stay with me all of my life.

I have been ministering with such wonderful staffs at St. Mary's, St. Felix and St. Francis. I have been blessed with the opportunity to learn from them, and from the pastor of St. Mary's, Father Tom Mull, and the parish administrator at St. Felix and St. Francis, Sister Joan Sobala, S.S.J. Both Father Mull and Sister Joan are holy and profoundly gifted people who are helping me to understand and become what it is that God has ordained me to be.

I am also enjoying meeting and getting to know my brother priests here in the diocese. I just returned from our annual convocation, and it was a wonderful opportunity to meet many of them, as well as to spend time with those whom I have developed close friendships with. Although I do not have the opportunity to be with my friends from the seminary as often anymore, I see where God has planted new life in me through these friendships.

If I were to describe this first year I would say that it is a process of falling in love. When I think of my vocation to the priesthood, I am thankful to my parents who loved each other for almost 50 years. I am thankful for the way that they showed me how to be servant to others. I am trying

to live my priestly life as a servant who lives the command of Jesus — love one another as I have loved you.

As I enter into and walk this journey of life with the people of St. Mary's, St. Felix, and St. Francis, I fall more deeply in love with them and the way they have helped me to fall more deeply in love with our God. Celebrating the sacraments with them, especially Sunday Mass, gives me great joy when we come together as a eucharistic family trying to help each other along the way, deepening our sense of call and vocation that God has given to all of us.

I love looking out at the congregation at Sunday Mass and seeing the

The Forum

For this month's installment of our new viewpoints section, the *Courier* invited three men at different stages of vocation to contribute their insights about the priesthood. The other two essays appear on pages A12 and A13.

people whose lives have intersected mine. I see them, but more importantly, I see the stories that their lives tell. Celebrating the joys and sorrows of their lives become eucharistic moments. I see the totality of their lives and how they come together to worship our God in a spirit of love and gratitude. The Eucharist is where we all meet, and we meet there in the most authentic way. We are real in the Real Presence of Christ.

I do not need to remind myself daily of the quote on my ordination invitation because the people remind me of it every day. Their presence reminds me that I want to be servant to them so that together we can serve God.

Father Mark Brewer currently serves as priest intern at St. Mary Church, Canandaigua.



ROCHESTER:

Wednesday, June 9, 2004, 7:00-8:30 pm
St. Bernard's School of Theology and Ministry,
120 French Rd.

SYRACUSE:

Tuesday, June 8, 2004, 7:00-8:30 pm
The Spiritual Renewal Center, 1118 Court Street

WATKINS GLEN:

Thursday, June 10, 2004, 7:00-8:30 pm
St. Mary's of the Lake, 905 Decatur Street

Plus, don't forget to join us for one our
SIT IN ON A CLASS NIGHTS

Women in the New Testament	Wednesday, June 16, 6:00 pm
Thomas Merton	Wednesday, June 16, 6:00 pm
Pastoral Minister as Healer	Tuesday, June 15, 6:00 pm
Intro. to Theology & Ministry	Tuesday, June 15, 6:00 pm

All events are free, but you must pre-register by calling (585) 271-3657 ext 290



ST. BERNARD'S
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY AND MINISTRY

120 French Rd. • Rochester, NY 14618
For more information call (585) 271-3657 ext 290
or by e-mail at lhouser@stbernards.edu
on the web at www.stbernards.edu



apl/Catholic Courier

on branches at
h 29.

ago.
he first in the
in." Weisbeck
aid, more than
ps have been
of the kiosks
D persons per
week.

munity have a
in Holy Sepul-
gt, associate
ogt served as
y executive di-
his retirement
succeeded by

a presentation
cal Society on
round, devel-
He said he's
ilar presenta-
a community
in which peo-
rested.

is the history
ause all of the
e, you can see
es," Vogt said.



"Nunsense"

her to your door
rehearsal dinner,
unction, parish
ent, bar mitzvah,
ather's/Uncle's
atever!

ng events

lather
7445
PHONE
l.com