

THE SHEPHERD'S CORNER

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

On Sunday, May 19th, I celebrated my 35th Anniversary of Ordination, the following is the Homily from the celebration:

This is the weekend when I am going to make a relatively rare exception to my general rule that says the homily needs to be all about the Scriptures of the weekend. You may be thinking: "well the only other thing that Pastors generally talk about is money." Rest easy, I am not going there either. Rather, I would like to offer a reflection upon the occasion of my 35th Anniversary of Ordination. It was 35 years ago today at the Cathedral of Saint James where I pledged myself to a life long relationship to the Church of the Diocese of Brooklyn. I even have a ring to prove it. In my wildest dreams I could never have imagined that 35 years later this local church would be dealing with news headlines about a sexual abuse scandal and its after affects that have rocked the Church and this local Church of Brooklyn - 108 credibly accused priests and the financial restitution to the victim survivors. Not in my wildest dreams could I have seen this coming. And this morning I feel compelled to apologize to you, God's people, for such a sinful abuse of your trust by leadership on so many levels. I am deeply sorry for that. Yet, as we hear in the Gospel of Mark (4:35-41), as the violent storm raged around them the apostles turned to Jesus who encouraged them to have faith, as he brought peace and restored order. The lesson is there for us too, just as for the disciples, about who to look to for help and guidance in these troubled times - it is Jesus. In the marriage vows we hear the words: "for better or for worse." And there have indeed been many good times for me in my 35 year relationship with Christ's bride the Church. For that I am deeply grateful to God.

I am in love - I love being a Catholic and I love being a Catholic priest. The Catholic priesthood is the vehicle through which I have been able to experience and participate in the love of God. As Saint Augustine once shared: "To fall in love with God is the greatest of romances, to seek him the greatest adventure, to find him the greatest human achievement." These words of Augustine resonate in my heart with deep emotion. God is defined in Sacred Scripture as love, as we heard this morning: "My children, I will be with you only a little while longer. I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another."

I can remember the chanting of the Litany of the Saints, followed by the imposition of hands by Bishop Mugavero and all the priests who gathered for the celebration; the anointing of my hands with the Oil of Chrism and being told: "You are priest of the order of Melchizedek and forever" (Hebrews 7:18).

The Catholic priesthood is the vehicle through which I have been able to experience and participate in the love of God. I don't want to sound disrespectful or even simplistic with regard to the priesthood, but as a priest I have found life. Could I have found life in another profession - sure, my first choice was to be an undertaker; could I have life in another ministry; could I have found life being married and with a family? I can say yes, without a doubt. But why a priest, especially today? Very simply, because I have had the powerful witness of my parents, family, friends and parishioners to show me a God who has taken care of us as we are and where we are, and I have

allowed that witness and grace to lead me to find paths I would not have otherwise followed.

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True enough, no other profession seems to offer the kind of anguish, headache and heartache, and yet joy, affection and serenity as does the priesthood for me. In any given day I can dodge the crushing blows of a dissatisfied parishioner as well as witness the miracle of a new birth to a family struggling to conceive. In any given day I can tremble with the commanding emotions of deep sorrow and profound joy, of anxiety and grief, of death and life. And still in all of this I believe.

The parish is where the graces of the priesthood are most operative. It is where Mass is celebrated most frequently, is it the primary location in which people are reconciled to God through the Sacrament of Penance; and it is where marriages and baptisms and confirmation occur. In short, it is the place where the priest, as priest, can do the most good for the People of God.

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So what have I learned over these past 35 years: I love what I do, most days. God is so good and so generous and so loving, so forgiving, that it is just a privilege to do my best to serve him. People are forgiving and most want to love the Church, their faith and even their Pastor - so my job is to try not to get in the way and mess that all up. Trust and Pray; be joyful - act like its GOOD NEWS that we are preaching an living. For all those who I have hurt (knowingly or not), offended, ignored, given bad advice or not responded to your needs. I am sorry and ask for forgiveness. I promise to keep trying to do better.

Thank you for allowing me to walk down memory lane. I think and pray that I still have some more fruitful and fun years ahead. I love what I do and God willing hope to keep doing it in the foreseeable future as we help each other to grow in holiness and live God's will in our lives.

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Easter peace!

Rev. Fr. Thomas V. Doyle

Pastor