

SAID ED April 2, 2017

45 Years of Being a Priest

As you know, last week I celebrated the 45th anniversary of my ordination to the priesthood. I'd like to share some reflections about these 45 years of serving as a priest. First of all, like so much in our human experience, it seems hard to believe that time has gone by so fast. I remember very clearly that March 24, 1972 evening when Bishop Joseph Hogan laid hands on me, ordaining me a priest for the service of the People of God in the Diocese of Rochester. It was a snowy night at St. Charles Borromeo Church in Greece. In those days ordinations took place at the parish church where we had been serving as transitional deacons. The community there had been very important in my formation and preparation for ordination. Many of my brother priests were there as well and they too came forward to lay hands upon me as a sign of our unity in Christ in union with our Bishop.

Nowadays this sign is expressed in other ways as we gather at the Cathedral for ordinations to the priesthood and diaconate, but it's still the same sign – the unity of purpose and mission in Christ. One of the roles of a priest is to build community as well as to be a visible sign of the presence of the Christ (and the Bishop) and all that his role implies. Most priests in a diocese are assigned to lead parishes. We do so by presiding in love over the community of faith. We celebrate the sacraments, preach and teach. The parish is the place where faith is celebrated and lived out. All other structures support and confirm this important role for the parish community. (We call this the Principle of Subsidiarity – always live the faith and make decisions as closest to the people in the pews as possible.)

As I look back over the years I am reminded of the many many people who have enriched my life and with whom I have been privileged to serve. I don't keep track of the number of Masses at which I preside, nor the Baptisms which I celebrate but I do track the weddings at which I officiate. Over the years I have had the wonderful privilege of presiding at the marriages of over 700 couples. Working with young couples is a great joy for me and a source of hope, energy and new life. As you may know, I spent several years as a young priest working in the Marriage Encounter Movement. In that work I grew to a deep appreciation of the challenges that married couples face. With great joy I came to understand how very much the Sacrament of Marriage is a vocation which powerfully complements the Sacrament of Holy Orders.

This knowledge has helped me value the collaboration and cooperation that it takes for a life-giving relationship to both nurture the couples and bring new life into our world. It has helped me provide effective leadership in the parish even as it calls forth the gifts of others. New life is the result and vibrant community is the outcome.

Thanks for calling me to new and deeper life in Christ by your living out of the Gospel in your lives!

Have a blessed fifth week of Lent!
