

## Living the Spirit Bishops

Some years ago I wrote an article on the subject of bishops. I do not have it anymore, and even the book(s) from which I derived much information seem to be long since discarded. I have been thinking of how we once again as a Diocese are about to have a new bishop. I would like to share some thoughts that have come to my mind. I have heard from time to time that bishops really are irrelevant and something of the past, not very important to the daily life of Catholics. This belief can only come from an incomplete religious education. In our times it is not easy to teach about all the many ways we must become learned Catholics. There seems to be so much more than ever before to cover in the areas which we must study and consider.

I am sure that most readers do not feel a need to think often about the bishop. It will seem enough to hear him mentioned in the prayers at Mass, and to find some interest in how he is meeting some problem facing the Church. It is not one of any disrespect for the office of the bishop. Many are just overwhelmed with our modern way of life with its constant calls for our attention to so many matters. We take for granted how our bishop is fulfilling the task given to him.

Some desire to have closeness to the bishop at a time when he is faced with great challenges. Today our bishops must find ways to preserve our faith in its teaching and practice. I think here of the difficulties had from the confusion of sexuality and gender, of the challenges to the protection of life at its beginning and its end, of the threats to our religious freedom to practice the faith. The bishops face, too, the lack of priests to cover the parishes long ago established, and the need in some areas to start new parishes. One cannot forget the financial challenges that the bishop faces in a world that changes rapidly in its material goals.

It is simply that we have come to expect a closeness that we cannot have in today's society. I might add that anyone who has an office of authority these days is likely to fail in the minds of some who expect perfection from their leaders. What is it we have a right to expect? My answer is to expect only what the individual bishop finds himself able to provide for us. In that providing, I see little to complain about.

We have been fortunate that our Diocese has had good bishops. Bishop McShea, our first bishop, was quite good at the work of founding our diocese community. The order he put into the life of the Church still is found in many ways. Bishop Welsh continued the work with a degree of adapting many areas of church life to modern needs. He saw the need for such things as budgets, while managing to maintain the teaching apostolate of the Church as the times allowed. Bishop Cullen continued the rather peaceful nature of our diocesan Church, despite obvious problems of diminishing numbers of committed Catholics – something the entire Church is facing. Bishop Barres will be remembered by his effort to be present often to the parishes and the many groups that make up our community.

We are fortunate in having Bishop Schlert as our new bishop. He is from the local Church. He knows already all the priests and has been our Vicar General for the two past bishops. He is known as more than competent, very spiritual, and a gentle leader. Like all bishops he will find many areas of difficulty and we will have to make his work successful by our support. As a priest I have found how good the people of our diocese have been in their support of the mission of the Church. I feel so happy that this is so.

Recall that a bishop is the pastor, the shepherd of our souls. His work is to supervise the teaching of the Church, to govern it for its good order, and to lead his flock to holiness by providing through his priests, deacons and lay workers the spiritual nourishment of their souls. It is only right for me to share with you my own desire to do all in my power to do what I can to advance that mission of the Church. I hope we can do our part with joy and love for the Church which is the source of so many good gifts. From our participation in this community desired by the Lord we can derive great solace and have the expectation of rewards this world cannot give.

From the Catechism of the Catholic Church

Individual bishops are the visible source and foundation of the unity in their own particular churches. ...they exercise their pastoral office over the portion of the People of God assigned to them.... ruling well their own churches as portions of the universal Church.

Bishops with priests as coworkers, have as their first task to preach the Gospel of God to all men, in keeping with the Lord's command. They are heralds of faith who draw new disciples to Christ; they are authentic teachers of the apostolic faith, endowed with the authority of Christ.... The bishop is the steward of grace, not as domineering over those in his charge but being examples to the flock.... Thus, together with the flock entrusted to them, they may attain to eternal life.

...bishops as vicars and legates of Christ, govern their particular Churches assigned to them by their counsels, exhortations and example, but above all by the authority and sacred power ... which they exercise in the spirit of service, which is that of their Master.

St. Ignatius wrote this to his faithful: "Let all follow the bishop as Jesus Christ follows his Father, and the college of presbyters as the apostles; respect the deacons as you do God's Law. Let no one do anything concerning the Church in separation from the bishop."

Let us pray for our Bishop

**O God, eternal shepherd of the faithful, who tend the Church in countless ways and rule over her in love, grant, we pray, that Bishop Alfred, your servant, whom you have set over your people, may preside in the place of Christ over the flock whose shepherd he is, and be faithful as a teacher of doctrine, a Priest of sacred worship, and as one who serves them by governing. Through Christ our Lord.**

*God bless and love you always!  
Monsignor David Morrison*