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Homily of Bishop Costello

by Thomas Costello

Homily of Bishop Thomas Costello
St. John Vianney Priest Gathering
St. Patrick's, Clayville
August 4, 2008

The people in the pews at your ordination remember best the prostration, which they saw as a sign of your reliance on God. Then they remember the imposition of hands and the kiss of peace, not just by the bishop, but more so by all those priests present. They didn't know the words, they didn't know the jargon, but it said, "incardination", "presbyterate", "belonging", "communion."

The Benedictine, Mark O'Keefe, rector of St. Meinrad's theologate speaks of priestly fraternity as a gift given in ordination as well as a task to be lived throughout the life of the priest.

Our presence here is an expression of that fellowship.

I want to suggest that we would do well to be more intentional in being together, in nourishing our fraternal relationships, supporting and affirming one another.

I KNOW IT IS A DIFFERENT CHURCH.

My seminary training told me that my friends ought to be principally, if not exclusively, brother priests. Social visits to parishioners were ill-advised; they could imply favoritism, or could generate "talk". We have grown beyond that advice, but might we have gone to the opposite extreme?

IT IS A DIFFERENT CHURCH!

My class, 20 of us, anywhere we were assigned, we were in proximity with four or five classmates. It has been twenty years since we have ordained as many as four in one class; classmates are just not that close by, if they 'are' at all.

Steve Rosetti has said that, "support from and for our brother priests is increasingly important as numbers dwindle."

In 1954, odds were that newly ordained were assigned to a rectory with two, if not three other priests, sharing a built-in fraternity at meals and in the common room. The present isolation confirms the "Lone Ranger Syndrome."

Pastoring multiple and merged parishes overloads already impossible schedules of liturgical and sacramental obligations. Then there are endless meetings, teaching and counseling responsibilities, and just being present to so many so often. Our busy-ness is an obstacle to priestly relationships.



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Diversity challenges cohesion. The generation gap is real. The dichotomies prompted by the so-called “national league” are far less pronounced than they once were, but vestiges do remain.

And now, we have received (I hope they say “welcomed”) priestly confreres from Poland and Africa. We espouse differing ecclesiologies too...which the late Walter Burghardt, SJ, points out, do shape our vision of priesthood.

We too easily malign those whose models of Church and priesthood differ from ours.

Those arrogant, authoritarian loyalists of the institutional Church. The consensus-seeking and shared responsibility advocates of the communion model. The liturgists (and you all know the difference between a liturgist and a despot – you can reason with a despot) with their vestments – even birettas – and incense from the sacramental model... The heralds, with their bibles and prayer groups who give undue emphasis to the Word... The servants, with their picket lines and endless petitions to be signed.

Do you ever notice that our conversations about one another’s triumphs and achievements are usually one-time proclamations – but our gossip about each other’s failures and foibles warrants repeated discussion and review?

How much do we support the brother who drops the ball or does the foolish? – In my own fiascos with sex ed., and inviting and disinviting Ronald Reagan, to recall just a couple, I received some support, though minimal; but it was deeply appreciated and powerfully encouraging. We need to be there for each other; not to agree – just be there.

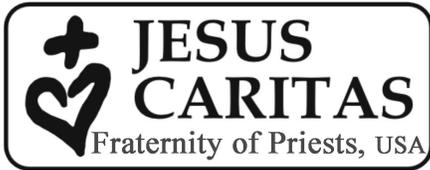
I am encouraged that Avery Cardinal Dulles revisited his models of the Church and developed a sixth – “Company of Disciples” ecclesiology, which was likely rooted in *Mystici Corporis*, the 1943 encyclical of Pius XII. We are all conformed to Christ as members of His Mystical Body through the character of baptism. We priests, by the character of orders, are further conformed and empowered to act *in persona Christi capitis* – Christ, the Head of the Mystical Body, which we have come to understand so clearly from John Paul II’s *Pastores Dabo Vobis*.

Ordination incorporates us into the presbyterate, a company of ministerial disciples, a visible fraternity, and a brotherhood. We need to find ways to celebrate, to affirm and to support each other, to be together in prayer publicly with each other and privately for each other. Our relationships need to be brought to prayer.

Our fraternity is about friendship AND MORE – it is about mission; that is deeper than all our differences.

IT IS A DIFFERENT CHURCH.

Gone are the support of 40 Hours gatherings and mandatory retreats; if you recall, the ‘renew’ process reintroduced us to those required 3 touching on 5 day exercises, and we did think it a good experience. Gone are Friday night card clubs, Sunday night meals at the Vestal Steakhouse (which itself 9s gone), North Bay clambakes, cookouts at IC Fayetteville, mafia meetings at Carl Denti’s compound on Chittenango creek, the annual Camp Nazareth



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outing, Don Gorman's golf tournament, the party at St. Christopher's pavilion.

The retired guys do get together regionally. The Southern Tier priests anticipate Mardi Gras every year.

But it is more than partying. We need to support each other, to be together, to pray together. We could do better with Alex Bay, with the Chrism Mass, and with vanishing support groups. Fortunately, we are pretty good about funerals for each other and our families.

It is good for us to be here! We need support and fraternity. Karl Rahner said rightly, "We come to know God only through relationships." Charles de Foucauld said that we, "learn to love God by loving others. John, the Apostle and Evangelist, tells us that the love of God was made manifest in sending his Son into the world for our salvation. If God so loved us, we ought to love one another.

There is evidence that American priests are under-developed in this regard.

I dare say that the priests of Syracuse could do better.