

Nekoosa native ready to hand on the faith

By FRANZ KLEIN
Staff Writer

NEKOOSA – “Contemplata aliis tradere” (“Hand on to others the things you have contemplated.”). Together with quotes from his favorite movies, this Dominican dictum has remained on the tip of Deacon Justin Kizewski’s tongue these past nine years.

During these years of intense study and spiritual formation, he has dedicated himself to this contemplation, looking forward to the day when he would be able to hand on the fruit of his efforts.

That day has arrived. On June 28, 27-year-old Deacon Kizewski will be one of three men ordained to the priesthood by Bishop Jerome E. Listecki at St. Joseph the Workman Cathedral in La Crosse.

Deacon Kizewski’s studies have taken him from the Twin Cities to Washington, D.C., and finally to the Eternal City of Rome. But his roots are firmly planted in Nekoosa, at Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish.

The only son among James and Brenda Kizewski’s many daughters, Deacon Kizewski was born on Nov. 8, 1980. He attended Sacred Heart’s school, which shuttered its doors at the end of this past school year.

It was later, at Assumption High School in Wisconsin Rapids, that Deacon Kizewski first felt the possibility of a vocation to the priesthood. More interested at the time in tennis and class government, Deacon Kizewski encountered then-school chaplain Father Joseph Hirsch, as well as several lay teachers who inspired him both with their witness of faith and their ability to ground this witness in the intellectual tradition.

Inspired, Deacon Kizewski made a leap of faith of his own. He never gave up his love of tennis, and he certainly never surrendered his penchant for movies of the romantic genre.

In fact, it was as a romantic at heart, in love with the Sacred Heart of Jesus, that Deacon Kizewski applied to the



Deacon Justin Kizewski

Diocese of La Crosse’s vocations office at the end of his senior year at Assumption. He wanted to play on God’s court, and according to the divine rules of discerning one’s vocation. It was for this reason that he entered St. John Vianney College Seminary in St. Paul, Minn., that fall.

Two years later, at the invitation of then-Bishop Raymond L. Burke, Deacon Kizewski applied and was accepted as a Basselin Scholar at the Catholic University of America – a unique program that allowed him to earn both bachelor’s and licentiate degrees in philosophy after five years of college-level study. There Deacon Kizewski developed a deep appreciation for the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas.

Bishop Burke assigned Deacon Kizewski to Rome for his theological studies following his 2004 graduation. Seminarians at the Pontifical North American College in Rome undertake their initial theological studies at either the Jesuit-run Gregorian University or the Dominican-run Angelicum University.

His love for St. Thomas and his respect for the intellectual tradition of the Dominicans he encountered in Washington, D.C., led Deacon Kizewski to choose the Angelicum. There, he earned

a bachelor’s in sacred theology last year, and has begun licentiate studies in dogmatic theology as well.

As Deacon Kizewski is well aware, though, there is far more to contemplation than study. Thus, the priest-to-be has made the most of his Roman experience. He has a deep love for St. Philip Neri, for example, and could often be found praying before the body of the “second apostle to Rome” in the Eternal City’s Chiesa Nuova.

Following his ordination to the diaconate at St. Peter’s Basilica last year, Deacon Kizewski chose to serve his Mass of Thanksgiving at the altar over St. Philip’s body. In addition, he became intimately familiar with St. Peter’s Basilica as a tour guide there.

He also had the opportunity to travel throughout Europe, and to immerse himself in German and French language study.

A true romantic and unable to keep his love to himself, Deacon Kizewski has already begun to hand on the fruit of his contemplation. In 2006 he began working in a chaplaincy position for students from the University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, Minn., at that school’s Rome campus. This past year he was also an adjunct philosophy instructor at the Rome campus of Christendom College, Front Royal, Va.

But Deacon Kizewski’s heart has always remained with his true love, here, in the Diocese of La Crosse – after all, this is the court on which God has called him to play. His first “match” was last summer working at Our Lady Queen of Heaven Parish in Wisconsin Rapids. The rest of the “game” will take place after his ordination, in which he will commit his priestly ministry to the faithful of the diocese, something he has dreamed of doing – contemplated, rather – for the past nine years.

As Deacon Kizewski put it once when speaking to his fellow seminarians, “We are studying for our future parishioners, and to become holy.”

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