

The Catholic Times, July 9, 2009

The Bishop's Corner

Bishop Jerome E. ListECKI

There is a certain phenomenon that occurs at the celebration of sacraments. At a wedding, for instance, although the faithful are caught up in the moment of a couple exchanging their vows, one can readily see in the eyes of the congregation a remembering which brings them back to that special moment in their own lives when they were pledging themselves to another in the name of the Lord. What should be an embedded feature-length movie running constantly in their experience in reality becomes snap shots, mere moments of that particular experience of that special day.

Many could never have conceived of the challenges that would confront them in married life and the journey they would be taking with that sacramental commitment. Quite possibly, it is because the reality of the sacrament is an ongoing experience that makes snap shots all the more appropriate since the movie has not ended, and the moment continues to be renewed in the living experiences of the couple.

I have often been present when an old wedding album was taken out and pictures that preserved the day were reviewed. "Mom, Dad," a young child would say with surprise, "you were really young!" Sometimes the youngest child, who can't image mom or dad apart from them, will say, "Mommy, Daddy where am I?" The parents will often say something appropriate and affirming like, "Well we had to pray to God for a child and He gave us you, and now we can't imagine our lives without you."

On June 27 in Saint Joseph the Workman Cathedral, I ordained five men as priests for the Diocese of La Crosse. Snap shots were happening in my own mind as I remembered that wonderful day when I was ordained a priest. I could never have imagined the journey on which the sacramental commitment would take me. My bride was the Church and her children were communities in Orland Park, Ill.; Chicago; North Riverside, Ill.; Mundelein, Ill.; the military; Rome, Italy; and the La Crosse Diocese in Wisconsin. I cannot imagine my life without the Church's children.

My ordination day was a beautiful day in mid-May 1975, blue sky, billowy white clouds. We followed the tradition of being ordained on a Thursday morning at the seminary. It was here that we spent four years of our lives in preparation as theologians, and the seminary itself was never more beautiful than on the day of ordination. There were 37 Chicagoans in my class – a 38th member was ordained for the diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend, Ind. John Cardinal Cody, archbishop of Chicago, ordained us in a ceremony that lasted over three hours. Not bad for 37 newly ordained priests. Our own recent ordination had five men and it lasted approximately two hours and twenty minutes. (It was most likely the long winded homily of the bishop, or the fact that we announced the assignments for our newly ordained towards the end of the ceremony.)

One of the most impressive aspects of the ordination rite is after the bishop imposes hands, which is the conferral of the sacrament itself. Priests who are present for the ordination are invited to also impose hands as a sign of solidarity with the bishop and the newly ordained. To view the priests of the diocese and visiting clerics impose hands is a wondrous sight. I watched as the priests, many of whom I know personally, opened

their priesthood to these newly ordained. They would now share in the sacrifice, build His Church and contribute to the priestly tradition of the Diocese of La Crosse and of the universal Church. In my own recollection of that moment in my ordination, over 600 priests imposed hands, and that part of the ceremony took nearly an hour. I personally felt the blessing of my brother priests, and I pray that our newly ordained felt the same towards these men who so courageously serve the Church.

Another special moment in the ceremony for me as the ordaining bishop is the reception of their first priestly blessing. I knelt before them and prayed that their priestly life might be as fruitful as mine, that the grace of the sacrament might enrich them every day of their lives, and that they may share generously the priesthood that has been given to them. At the end of the blessing, I kissed their hands, which, now anointed with sacred chrism, would offer the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and consecrate bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. These men are now representing Christ to the world. The first blessing of a priest is a privileged blessing and, as I finished the ceremony and returned to the sacristy, I viewed a number of family, friends and seminarians kneeling before the newly ordained and receiving a priestly blessing. I encourage all of you, should you encounter one of these newly ordained priests, to request his blessing. It's a special time for the Church and their priestly life, and besides, a blessing is always welcomed.

Pope Benedict the XVI has dedicated this year as the Year of the Priest. Saint Jean-Marie Vianney the Curé d'Ars, patron of priests, stated: "The priest will not understand the greatness of his office until he is in heaven." May the snap shots pictured in the minds of Fathers David Rybicki, Greg Michaud, Greg Bohren, Victor Feltes, and Jesse Burish be a constant reminder of the gift they have received and the gift they are called to share.

Photo tag

CT/Franz Klein

In what he describes as a "special moment" for him, Bishop Jerome Listecki receives the traditional first blessing from the newly ordained priests. Blessing Bishop Listecki are (from left) Fathers Jesse Burish, Gregory Michaud, David Rybicki, Victor Feltes and Gregory Bohren.