

September 2, 2018 22nd Sunday of Ordinary Time

These past few weeks have led me to take this question to my prayer: “Why am I a priest in the Catholic Church?” I ask this question because we are at the worst point of our history as Catholics in the United States. As I take this question to prayer, two answers come into focus. The first is that I am a priest because of God. God is the one who called me to this life and not for just the good times, but for all times, for this time. The second reason I am a priest because of you. As I celebrate the sacraments, preach God’s word and serve with you, I have seen a witness of fidelity in you. As are the people of God, here at St. Louise; you are the people that God has given me to help me on the journey to heaven.

While I was in Germany I read a book on the life of Deidrick Bonhoeffer, the Protestant German theologian and pastor who suffered a martyr’s death resisting the regime of Adolf Hitler. God called him in his time to fight against a horrible evil. Pastor Bonhoeffer began by seeking God’s will in all things and he spent hours daily in silent prayer constantly turning to God’s word, especially the Psalms. We too turn to God’s word and hear in today’s first reading which comes from the 4th chapter of the book of Deuteronomy speaks powerfully of the message of God’s fidelity. God gives the people of Israel statutes and decrees for this purpose: So that they may live. God’s way, God’s law is about life, about love, is about his promise to be with us in all things and at all times. He says these words to them as he chooses them, the smallest of nations, from all the nations on the earth: “for what great nation is there that has gods so close to it as the Lord, our God, is to us, whenever we call upon him?” God who is faithful, is near to us right now.

I have experienced God’s fidelity personally for my whole life and in particular through his call for to me to serve as a priest. I entered the seminary on September 4, 1974, 44 years ago this Tuesday. I graduated 9th in my class from St. Edward High School Seminary. There were only nine of us. I struggled at a student and later on learned that the Seminary faculty considered not recommending me to go on to the college level of studies. I was petrified about speaking in front of people and told my spiritual director that I didn’t think that I could ever have the courage preach. God who is always faithful, helped me, and in time, I overcame those fears. After ordination I experienced two personal challenges that left me emotionally vulnerable. My Dad died suddenly at the age of 54 and only four months after my ordination. The next year I witnessed a head-on car collision that killed a priest friend of mine. With less than two years of priesthood under my belt, I was at the lowest level of my life and had nothing to give to people and sincerely wondered if I had made a mistake to be ordained a priest. God who is faithful, sent people to help me, including a counselor. With time, I experienced healing from God. Self-doubts are something that many people struggle with and as a young priest I sincerely doubted that I had the administrative gifts to serve as a pastor. Again, God who is always faithful, sent people to encourage me, to teach me, to allow me to “test my wings” and

in time, those fears dissipated, and my greatest joy today is to serve as your pastor, a role that I do with God's grace with the support of an excellent staff, and the encouragement that I experience in you.

You are more than encouragement to me. In the words of the Letter of St. James today, I see in you are a witness of religion that is pure and true in the ways that you "care for the orphans and widow" which is biblical language for caring for anyone in need. I am humbled by your dedication priest. Truly, the people of St. Louise and the people of every parish that I have been assigned in my 32 years as a priest have bread that has nourished me on the journey of salvation. These days more than I ever, I need to tell you, thank you. Yes, I am a priest for you and I am aware now more than ever that I cannot be a priest without you.

These past two and half weeks have been nothing short horrific for anyone who cares about the Catholic Church. To many, Catholics look more like the hypocrites that Jesus names in the Gospel today than true people of faith. Anyone can fall into hypocrisy which is why at every Mass we beg the Lord to not "look on our sins, but on the faith of the Church." It is by God's grace alone and faith in Jesus Christ that we can overcome sin. I remain a priest because I believe more in God's fidelity than the infidelity of certain priests and bishops. I believe that despite the worst of our sins, Christ constantly renews us to be members of his own body. What kind of pastor would be if I turned away from God who has been faithful to me for the entire sixty years of my life and if I left you at this time of pain? In order to be the best pastor that I can be at this time in our history, I need you more than ever. I will work with our staff to develop a plan that will begin with prayer so that what we say and do is based on seeking God's will, as did Deidrick Bonhoeffer. We will than need to act. We will need to act by exercising the prophetic office given to us at our baptism to call for real change first in our Church and also for our society. I will keep you informed about new developments through the bulletin, Flocknote messages and on our parish website.

Sin is ugly and we must do everything we can to eradicate it with the power of Christ. Our faith is a gift from God, our Catholic faith is beautiful and we must do all we can to guard and protect it.