

NEW LIFE

As I write this, it is March 17, Saint Patrick's Day. Exactly 23 years ago today, the Slovaks joined the Irish in celebration. That was the day when the Faithful of this Diocesan Church learned that I had been named to be their new Bishop. I do not know how many others celebrated, as most would have responded to the news with the question, "Who is he?"

He is now 23 years older, has grey hair and less of it, and considers the Allegheny Mountains his home. This morning, I happened to find a copy of the March 30, 1987, issue of *The Catholic Register*. It carried the story of the announcement and some photographs. Whatever happened to the young-looking priest pictured there?

What happened was a journey. It continues to be a journey of our Faith and we are on it together. I want to continue it with you. Therefore, I chose not to leave the Diocese upon my retirement from active episcopal ministry. That journey with you has given me a life that has been both wonderful and challenging.

The date of this issue of *The Catholic Register* is March 29. That is the day on which we celebrate the Chrism Mass at the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament in Altoona. You may have noticed the photo of me celebrating my first Chrism Mass in 1988, which was reprinted in the last issue. The Chrism Mass is one of my favorite liturgical events, celebrating (as it does) the life of our Diocesan Church.

It not only celebrates life but nurtures life. Seeing representatives of all of our parish faith communities present and then file out of the Cathedral with the newly blessed and consecrated oils, as they carry them to their respective pastors to be presented at the Holy Thursday Memorial of the Lord's Supper, is truly an awesome sight! Those that have never been present at a Chrism Mass have been missing a memorable event in our Diocese. Since that Mass is celebrated only once each year and only by the Diocesan Bishop, it will be one of the things that I will deeply miss in my retirement.

Next Sunday, April 4, we will be celebrating the Solemnity of the Lord's Resurrection. Easter speaks of new life in all of its various aspects. As one grows older, Easters appear to be coming faster and more frequently. Perhaps, it is because we learn how to approach the Holy Season of Lent more realistically and effectively.

Recently, I gave an afternoon of reflection to the men and women in consecrated life in our Diocesan Church. I used the example of the underside of an embroidered piece of cloth, which looks like a mess of threads running in all sorts of directions and (seemingly) without purpose. Only by looking at the other side do we see the masterpiece for which those threads are instrumental.

Lent is a time to reflect on the messiness of our lives. At times, it appears that we are running all over the place and getting nowhere. It is important to remember that we are not the ones with the master plan. The Lord our God has that. Our lives are only some of the threads that make up his overall picture. Coming to a keen awareness of that can result in a celebration of Easter that truly speaks of a deeper, new life in us who are invited to be a resurrection people, even though we find ourselves so often on the way of the cross.