

## **A NEW CHAPTER**

Currently, I am reading a book called *His Excellency*. No, it is not about any bishop. It is a biography of George Washington, to whom we refer as *the father of our country*. Page after page, the book reveals the complexity of a man who was key to the colonies' independence. Chapter after chapter, one sees the shaping of a nation.

As we celebrate another Fourth of July, we celebrate the new chapter that our Founding Fathers dared to write in the history of our country. Chapters written by succeeding generations have reflected the life of a people that looks forward and not backward. If it were otherwise, we would not be observing a holiday this weekend.

While our nation celebrates its 234<sup>th</sup> anniversary, I celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my priesthood in Christ and his Church. Almost half of those years have been as the Bishop of Altoona-Johnstown. They have encompassed a number of chapters. Soon to reach my 75<sup>th</sup> birthday, I will be ending one and beginning another.

There are always new chapters to be written. No new chapter can begin before the previous one is ended. When one chapter ends, another begins, until the last word has been written. That is true with life, as well.

All too many regard retirement as an end. It is not an end but another beginning. I view it as a promotion, one that elevates me to another level of existence and of service. A priest does not stop being a priest at his retirement, nor does a bishop cease being a bishop at his. It simply means that responsibilities have changed.

Another thing that will change to some degree is the life of our Diocesan Church, which is so intimately bound to its bishop and shepherd. The new Diocesan Bishop will have new insights and will lead into new pastures. Together with him, we, his flock, will write a new chapter in the volume begun by the Servant of God Demetrius A. Gallitzin.

As I indicated in my homily at the Blair County Ballpark Mass a week ago, we have written some significant chapters as a Diocesan Church. With each, we have grown and found freedom in our Lord Jesus. We have discovered that the mountains give us a common identity rather than separating us one from another. We have learned that separate houses of worship have nothing to do with who we are, as faithful followers of the Lord Jesus. We have experienced the way of the cross as the way that leads us into a more authentic life in the Lord.

These are exciting times. They are times of gladness. We just need to stay open to the adventure and allow God's Spirit to lead us.

What is the next chapter of my life going to be like? A number of people have asked me that. Of course, I do not know the exact content. I, too, will let God's Spirit show the way. What I might like to do is serve a parish, engage in some writing, and do a little traveling. What I need to do is spend time getting to know my Lord better. This latter surprises individuals who ask about what I am going to be doing. Regrettably, too many administrative demands on a bishop's time limit him in this regard. Saint Gregory the Great, pope at the end of the Sixth Century, voiced the same lament. And, he was once a monk. I do not think that I will go that route!