

OUR PRESBYTERATE

Adversity seems to bring out the best in people. That was so very true in the days following September 11 of 2001. We have all seen it occur on various occasions during our lives. It expressed itself recently in our Diocesan Church.

With the sudden death of Father Paul E. Turnbull in Johnstown on May 14, Our Mother of Sorrows Parish was left without a priest. The Johnstown Deanery was left without a dean. Since it was the weekend, our chancery was without staff. And, yet, a situation was thrust upon me as Diocesan Bishop, which needed to be addressed without too much delay.

I was very impressed and am deeply grateful to our priests who, on their own, reached out to Deacon Scott, assigned to Our Mother of Sorrows and left to deal with the situation. Several priests went to the parish to celebrate the Masses scheduled for the weekend. Some called him to guide him through the basic planning of a priest's funeral. Others offered their services in various other ways. I know that Deacon Scott must have felt the outpouring of support on the part of our priests for one of our deacons at a very difficult time.

One might say that this is what priests ought to do. That is true. But, it does not always happen with such spontaneity, harmony, and effectiveness. The generous, priestly spirit of our Presbyterate truly became evident that weekend. (Presbyterate is what we call the community of our diocesan priests.)

We do have very generous priests. Many wear several hats in their multiple responsibilities within our Diocesan Church. They do so without complaining. At the present, there is no priest in any of our diocesan offices that does not serve in a parish as well. Some fill several offices, in addition to being a pastor.

This Diocesan Church is experiencing a shortage of priests, - every year, more and more. Yet, there is no one that does not have an opportunity to participate at Mass within a comfortable driving distance. That is due to the generous service provided by our priests.

Times of adversity are not the only times that the priestly character of our priests becomes evident. You, the Faithful whom our priests serve, can attest to that better than I can.

To see our priests reaching out in support to one of our deacons on the occasion of Father Turnbull's death was a wonderful thing for me to behold. Equally as admirable was the solicitude with which a deacon of our Diocesan Church took to oversee the burial rites of his pastor. In all of this, the unity of our Church has been quite evident. Priests supporting deacons and deacons working with priests, - walking together in service to God's People.

Father Turnbull was a pastor who understood such a unity in the Church. He fostered it in the parishes where he was pastor. Our diocesan pilgrimages to the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington D.C., which he organized, reflected that, as well. Thanks to his efforts, those pilgrimages have become a powerful sign of our unity as the faithful, the religious, the deacons, the priests, and the bishop of our Diocesan Church. The passing of good men is never without benefit to the community from which the Lord calls them. Neither is his.