

**EXPRESSIONS of THANKS**

Words appear to be so empty at times. Yet, I have no other way than these words to express my gratitude to so many of you for the wonderful celebration of my several anniversaries. Your prayers and good wishes (expressed verbally and by cards) have touched my heart. Learning what the Lord has been able to do has welled up my heart with joy. What a wonderful Church we are becoming to be!

I have experienced several signs of that, even after the celebration. In recognition of my anniversaries, the students of our Catholic schools have pledged a total of 22,000 hours of Christian service. That is equivalent to someone serving others in the name of Christ continuously for two and one half years. That is truly awesome! Our students are learning to be authentic Christians. That, in itself, is worthy of celebration.

The teachers and catechists of our Diocesan Church gave me a gift of one thousand dollars. What is significant about that is that it is earmarked for the fund that has been established to assist the process of the Servant of God Demetrius A. Gallitzin cause for canonization. I see in this a recognition of our pioneer evangelizer as the first teacher of the Faith in these Allegheny Mountains. What a marvelous connection. I am overwhelmed with joy.

My gratitude extends to the Pastors and the parish faith communities that they shepherd. It is they, through our Presbyteral Council that sponsored the celebration two weeks ago. The turnout of priests, deacons, religious, and laity was truly a sign of encouragement to me, as we prepare to receive another bishop upon my retirement. The support and cooperation of one's collaborators is key to the success of leadership. For any diocesan bishop, the priests are special collaborators. We have traveled through some difficult times together. I am grateful to them, as well as to the deacons and religious.

Remarks at the celebration reminded me of some wonderful things that the Lord has been able to accomplish through us. I had not realized how significant those things were in the lives of our people. Collaboration made those achievements possible, for which the Lord deserves the praise. I am deeply appreciative to those making remarks at the dinner for lifting up those blessings in gratitude to the Lord.

I am grateful to the Holy Father for his greetings, which he signed personally. Of course, someone was kind enough to inform him. Nevertheless, the fact that the Pope was willing to do that means much to me. With Pope John Paul II, it was awesome to me to be able to say that the Holy Father recognizes me by sight. And, now, with Pope Benedict XVI, to be able to say that I received a personal greeting from him is awesome as well.

Now, the focus needs to be upon the future of this Diocesan Church. We await our next Diocesan Bishop. It should be an exciting time for all of us, as we look forward to welcoming him and assuring him of our cooperation, while together we continue our pilgrimage of faith into the Lord's Reign.

On that continuing journey of ours, let us remember who we are. Always, let us remember who we are. Let that make a difference in our lives and in the world around us. At all times, let us remember that we are of the Household of God!