

**Bishop's Homily**  
**CELEBRATION of THANKSGIVING**  
**Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament**  
**September 12, 2010**

You may not realize it, - but, today, is Grandparent's Day. The foundress, Marian McQuade, intended it to be a way of celebrating and honoring the lonely elderly in nursing homes. She also hoped to encourage grandchildren to inherit the wisdom and heritage from their grandparents.

Well, I do not feel ready for any nursing home. As for imparting any wisdom and appreciation for the heritage of our Diocesan Household, I trust that the Holy Spirit will take care of that for future generations.

Our being here this afternoon has one objective. That is to give praise to the Lord our God for whatever good we, together, have allowed him to bring about within this Diocesan Church, - and to seek his mercy for the times that we may have stood in his way and frustrated his plans.

I am very pleased and grateful that you have come to do that with me.

Representing my family are four members from the Republic of Slovakia, from where my parents came. Present is my mother's brother's daughter's daughter, her husband, their daughter, and her son. (You figure it out!) They, likewise, represent the Diocese of Nitra for which I was ordained priest and with which status I was named Bishop of Altoona-Johnstown.

Also present are several of the Faithful from my home diocese of Saginaw in Michigan, as well as several parishes where I served.

I wish to recognize the presence of my brother bishop and friend, Bishop Donald Trautman of Erie, - as well as my ecumenical brothers, Metropolitan Nicholas Smisko of the American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese and the Right Reverend Gregory Pile, Bishop of the Allegheny Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Also present, are representatives of the Slovak Catholic community in the United States, as well as in Rome.

[Others present: Very Rev. Christian Oravec, TOR, Provincial of the Sacred Heart Province, and Very Rev. Patrick Quinn, TOR, Provincial of the Immaculate Conception Province, - as well as Dr. Matthew Bunson, Diocesan Historian and biographer of the Servant of God Demetrius A. Gallitzin.]

And, of course, there are all the rest of you, - my diocesan family, - including the various Knights and Ladies, the bearers of the Gallitzin Cross Award, and my staff. You make me look good, - and, I do not mean just here.

Know that I am deeply grateful to all of you, - and, not only for being here, - but for being a part of my life. As a result of your encouragement and support, I am who I am.

75 years have passed since I came into this world. I thank our gracious God for entrusting me with the wondrous gift of life. I also observe my 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary as an ordained priest, praying that the Lord may have found me to be an instrument through which He was able to work out the salvation of those to whom I was sent.

More than 23 years have passed since my ordination and installation in this Cathedral as Bishop of Altoona-Johnstown. I have been asked if those years went by fast or slowly. Actually, to me, it seems like I have always been here. I consider that a good thing.

In preparing for this day, I pondered once again (as I did on that day in May of 1987) how one's life appears to be planned even though one has not planned it. Indeed, it appeared to me to be the case then, - and it appears to be the case to this day.

As I prepare to hand the crozier over to another, it is natural for me to reflect on the quality of my stewardship of this portion of the Household of God during these past 23 plus years. Only this morning, we priests read in the Office of Readings the words of Saint Augustine. There, he speaks of those who shepherd the Lord's flock. He reminds us that we have two roles. One is to be a shepherd for the good of God's People. The other is to be a good Christian, along with those whom we shepherd.

This latter can become rather elusive, - as administrative duties take up one's time and energy. Pope Gregory the Great lamented this very fact. Therefore, one of the things that I need to do in my retirement is to acquaint myself more intimately with the Lord, my God. In my giving an accounting to the Lord, I will have two books to balance: - one in terms of my being a bishop and the other in terms of my being a Catholic Christian.

One of my fears has been that, - when I finally come face to face with the Lord and relate to him all the wonderful efforts in which I was involved for his Church, - He might say, "That is not what I meant."

I take consolation in the message of the readings from Sacred Scripture that we heard proclaimed this afternoon. The shepherd welcomes back the stray sheep. The woman rejoices over her finding the lost coin. God relents in his anger at his people for becoming depraved. And, the Apostle Paul speaks of the Lord treating him mercifully, "...the grace of our Lord has been granted me in overflowing measure..."

Indeed, it has. Some of you may recall that here on the day of my ordination as bishop, I alluded to the lyrics: "The hills are alive with the sound of music." I stated that I looked forward to singing that song with you in these beautiful Allegheny Mountains.

However, I have had to come to the conclusion that my stewardship was not about my own agenda and the song was not to be of my own choosing, - but the Lord's. Actually, it would not have been stewardship if it were otherwise. Consequently, our Diocesan Church is better for it, - and, so am I.

I have tried to make decisions, which I considered to be correct, even though difficult, - attempting to stay open all the while to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, - even when that prompting appeared to be going against what I thought should be done. Taking the easy way out was not an option open to me. As a result, I am aware that I have caused people to be hurt. Please understand that such was never my intent, - and I ask your understanding and forgiveness.

Do I have any regrets? Some. Perhaps, the paramount regret is that I have failed in some way to convince our Faithful that encouraging their sons, grandsons, and sons of friends to accept the Lord's call to serve him in the Church as a priest would be something of which they would be proud. Consequently, we have had to reduce the number of parishes more drastically than we might have otherwise.

In conclusion, let me assure you that I am deeply aware that what growth as Church has occurred in our Diocese is of your doing; - of your understanding what it is that we are as the Church. I am grateful to you the Faithful, the Religious, the Deacons, and the Priests for that support.

Despite the mountains that tended to separate us in more ways than one, we have become a more homogenous Diocesan Church. If I were to have a headstone someday (which I will not), an appropriate description (according to me) would be, "He tried to make of us one."

Two days before I was ordained, I gathered with the clergy of the Diocese to pray. My bishop's insignia were blessed at that Prayer Service. It was on that evening that I explained how my becoming the Diocesan Bishop did not mean that I had already arrived at the destined shore and was called upon simply to pull the boat toward me. I said that we were all in the same boat together, trying to reach the proper shore together. My role, as Diocesan Bishop, was to see that everyone was rowing in unison so that we would not be going around in circles. Those of you who have ever been in a rowboat know that you do not get anywhere that way.

And, if I were to leave you with a parting thought, it would be this: Remember who you are. Always, remember who you are; - in your homes, at work and school, during recreation, and (of course) in your parish faith communities, - remember who you are. Let that make a difference in your life and in the world around you.

**Remember that you are of the Household of God!**