

Reflections

by the

Most Reverend Thomas J. Murphy



Looking back and ahead!

I don't know where the time went. Twenty-five years seem to be a significant period of time, but as I reflect on the past twenty-five years in my own life, they seem to have gone by much too quickly. Yet, as I take time to think about these years, the primary image I have is that of countless people who asked me to be a part of their lives because I was a priest.

A priest does not just happen. A priest is the result of the gifts of many others. In my own case, it was the environment of a family where religious belief in the Church was a priority. It was the witness and encouragement of parish priests and religious women who went out of their way to encourage me and prod me on. It was the incredible opportunity of contact with teachers who challenged me and family and friends who supported me. But it was primarily the grace of God who twenty-five years ago this week invited me to come forward in the sanctuary of the seminary chapel and to be ordained a priest by His Eminence Samuel Cardinal Stritch.

I don't know any other era in history where so much has happened in such a brief period of time, whether in the world or in the Church. And being a priest meant being a part of that world and the Church with all the challenges that have marked this unique time. But being a priest meant primarily being invited to enter into the lives of others and to trace somehow the touch of God in peoples' lives through Word and Sacrament. And each time, I shared whatever gifts I possessed, I was blessed a hundred-fold with friendship, love, care and concern by others.

Do I have regrets after twenty-five years as a priest? I regret the times when I could have been the better person, and the better priest. I regret the non-response to the cry of others, when I became absorbed with my own concerns. I regret the failure to love God and others as I might have done. But in no way do I regret the response I made to be a priest. In fact, I believe it is the way in which I must respond to God's love and care for me.

The primary image I have of the past twenty-five years is the parade of faces which run through my mind of people who graced me with their presence - their presence in the parishes which I served, the special ministries in which I was involved, in the seminary community where I was privileged to deal with young men considering priesthood as a vocation, and these past almost five years as Bishop here in Eastern Montana. I am who I am today because of the graced presence of others.

As I celebrate this 25th anniversary of ordination this week, it will be a time to rejoice. But it will also be a time to think about the people no longer present, who helped me come to this point in my life - my parents, my sister-in-law, Peg, and countless relatives and friends. But somehow or other, I think they'll be around for they have always been.

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And the future? I pray that God will share his grace with me, to offer me strength to counter my weakness, to sustain my faith, to offset my doubt, to provide me with wisdom and courage to be the priest for the Church of today and tomorrow. And what do I wish for as I celebrate this anniversary? More than anything else, I wish that other young men in the world today would consider the priesthood as a vocation, that other young men say "Yes" to a vocation, that other young men would share Word and Sacrament and their lives with the Church of tomorrow.

I give thanks for the special grace of being a priest here in Eastern Montana, of serving the Church in this Diocese as Bishop. I ask for your prayers that I might serve God and the People of God generously and faithfully. Thank you for who you are and the grace you are to me!