

Farewell Celebration  
Most Rev. Thomas J. Murphy  
August 17, 1978  
St. Mary of the Lake Seminary

Six weeks ago yesterday, it was announced that our Holy Father, Pope Paul VI, had appointed me as the Bishop of Great Falls, Montana. That announcement will have its full impact next Monday evening when I will be ordained a Bishop for the service of the People of God of the Diocese of Great Falls.

The intervening weeks since that announcement have been a time of joy and sorrow, of hopes and doubts, of anxiety and faith. The weeks have been filled with celebrations and gatherings where people have come together to extend to me their congratulations, their hopes, their prayers. And finally now the celebrations come to an end and the journey begins for myself as I enter a new ministry, a new form of service to God and to the Church.

It is only right that this final celebration take place here at St. Mary of the Lake; it is only right that it takes place in the presence of my fellow priests of the Archdiocese of Chicago, of the seminarians preparing for priesthood for the Archdiocese of Chicago, and members of my family who represent the wide spectrum of people who have invited me into their lives; it is only right that this celebration takes place in the context of the Eucharist which is the focal meeting point for all our lives as a people of faith.

So often before I have heard the readings of today's liturgy when they have been used for the various ceremonies, ministries and ordinations here at Mundelein. But this Word of God takes on a new urgency and a new meaning in the context of what is happening in my own life. I resonate with the call of the prophet Jeremiah who is told not to be afraid as he embarks on a mission in response to the Lord's call. The injunction of Paul to Timothy makes so much sense as one becomes aware of the call the Lord offers all of us - not because of our own talent or abilities, but because of his own purpose and his grace. The Gospel of John is a challenge of service to follow the Lord wherever he leads us.

And for some unfathomable reason, I have been asked to accept the responsibility of being a Bishop in the Church of today, in a diocese far from where I have been raised and where I have exercised my priesthood. How does such an event happen? I believe a man is called to follow the Lord in the context of the people who have been a part of his life. A man is never, or should never, be named a bishop in a vacuum. A man is named a bishop in the context of the presbyterate of which he has been a part, in the relationship to a people whom he has served, in the reality of family and friends who have shared their life and love with him. And that is the real reason for the celebration today - the presbyterate of Chicago, the people of Santa Maria del Popolo, St. Frances of Rome, the Archdiocesan Council of Catholic Women, St. Paul of the Cross, the faculty, students and staff of St. Mary of the Lake Seminary and the family of which I am a part. In a very real sense of the word, today is your celebration as much as it is mine; today is an honor shared by all of you as much as it is an honor experienced by myself.

It was not without some fears and some tears that I accepted this position. The fears were the awareness of my own limitations, my own humanity. Juxtaposed to the fears were the tears involved as a result of realizing I would be leaving a place and a people who have symbolized the meaning of home to me for the last 45 years. And yet, despite the fears and the tears, I responded affirmatively to the request made of me. And the basic reason for my acceptance was the fact that I was asked to exercise a position of leadership and responsibility in the Church today. For me, this Church, despite its human frailty, is the animator and facilitator for the presence of God in the world today. To respond in any other way to the invitation extended to me would be a contradiction of my belief in this Church and the reality it represents. And so I place my trust and faith in the Lord for in Christ, there is joy and hope.

But just as a man should not be asked to exercise leadership in this Church in a vacuum, likewise a man's idea of what a Bishop should be is also in the context of a presbyterate, of a people of God, of a family of which he is a part. I believe I owe you in justice the hopes I have for the style of leadership I would like to offer as a Bishop. I was fortunate enough to have someone concretize these hopes for me in the form of a prayer. It is this prayer that I hope will become a reality for myself and the priests and people of the Diocese of Great Falls.

Fr. John Shea offered me this gift a few weeks ago when he added to his new book of prayer-poems an insight which provides me with an agenda for the rest of my life. John Shea wrote "A Prayer for a Bishop." Using the numerous Peter images from Scripture, Fr. Shea offers a series of pastoral guidelines.

Never forget  
there are things more important  
than fishing nets

Preside like a man  
unafraid to sink.

Wherever life is transfigured,  
build a tent for it is good.

Beware!  
Even the maids in the courtyard know  
when your speech betrays you.

Remember  
the argument about who is first  
takes place on the road to the cross.

Always acknowledge  
in the troubled mix of flesh and blood  
the Son of the living God.

Listen  
for the Spirit in everyone,  
even Cornelius.

Sin with the heart  
that swims naked to shore  
and not with the mind  
that will not be washed.

Run with the young  
whenever tombs come up empty.

Murph,  
may your crozier  
be as lean as the prophet's staff  
and your ring  
fit the finger of everyone.

If John Shea's prayer becomes a reality in my life, it will not be my doing but rather will be the results of your prayers, your hopes, your dreams of a Church which is constantly renewing itself to serve the modern world.

As I prepare to leave early tomorrow morning for a new ministry and a new service in the Church, I realize I leave so much behind me. I leave a people and a geographical location which have been my life. In a special way, I leave Mundelein with all that it means and symbolizes as a harbinger of hope for the future. I leave a presbyterate whose members have been a source of challenge and encouragement to me in countless ways. And I leave a family whose love and care and concern have been a gift to me which knows no value.

I am most grateful to His Eminence John Cardinal Cody for his support and encouragement and I regret that the present events in Rome prevent him from being here with us this morning. I am also most grateful to Msgr. Joseph Howard and the members of the committee which arranged this final celebration along with all those here at the seminary who have contributed their time and talent and energy to make this day possible. I want to thank Bishop Abramowicz who has joined us today and who will be one of the ordaining bishops at my ordination next Monday evening. And finally, to you the presbyterate of the Archdiocese of Chicago, thank you so very much.

Do I leave with sadness? Yes I do!

Do I leave with pain? Yes, I do!

Do I leave with regret? Yes, I do!

But to leave without sadness, without pain, without regret would be a contradiction of what you have offered me and who I am. Please pray for me that I might be a good Bishop, that I might be a man who is not afraid to sin with his heart which swims naked to shore instead of the mind that will not be washed.

Thomas J. Murphy