

From the Pastor's Desk

As far as seasons of life are concerned, this past week I moved from the late summer to the early autumn of my life. On Wednesday, I turned 55 years old. I know that for many of you it may seem as if I am merely a “pup” (as I have been told on several occasions): nevertheless, I took some time that day to take stock of my rather full life and found myself rediscovering how truly blessed I am. I have no intention of boring anyone with countless lists of the events, opportunities, struggles, successes, failures, challenges, and blessings that have met me on the journey of life. No, I would rather share with you some of the theological and spiritual insights that I have been afforded and that have matured over the years in the hope that you can know me met just a bit better, as a person, a man, a Catholic, a priest, and a theologian. Hopefully this will allow us to further cement the beautiful relationship that we have had over what has been almost 10 years.

I want you to know that were I to categorize my life in a summary phrase I would say that it would be an incessant quest for the living God in the person and event of Jesus Christ (i.e., the paschal mystery). Since I was young, I was always enamored by the thought of being a “friend” of Christ revealed to me so graciously by the Father through the power of the Holy Spirit. My personal desire to know Jesus was complimented by academic and spiritual pursuits from high school, into philosophy at college, theological formation in the seminary, and graduate study commencing in doctoral work. My existential expedition, however, just began once I received my PhD, for I have been a life-long learner, being consumed by the reading of both academic texts and spiritual writings, especially those that have been penned by the modern-day popes (from John XXIII though Francis). Many times, I have been blessed both to find scholarly merit and formative spirituality in the writings of the popes which I have found in a particular way in the writings of Benedict XVI and Francis, albeit they are set in very different frameworks. Both of these humble shepherds have been very helpful in forming my view of the Church and the priesthood today. I owe a great deal to them for they have modeled for me true friendship with Christ on avenues equally erudite and pastoral. When it comes to Pope Benedict XVI, his writings on Christology and on the Theological Virtues of Faith, Hope, and Love have been particularly helpful. When it comes to Francis, his writings on mercy, the environment, and holy orders are some of his

most profound insights, yet there are a virtually a plethora of topics that he has addressed that have more than caught my attention and influenced my spiritual and pastoral ministry. I have been truly blessed by all the writings of the modern popes (even though I do not have time to mention those of John XXIII, Paul VI, and John Paul II with any specificity here due to the limitations of space). Let me say, that among the great theologians of the twentieth and twenty-first century, the aforementioned popes certainly hold their own. They have been instrumental in my theology and my priesthood, and I owe them all a great debt.

Equally formative for me has been my ministry. I must admit that it was always my dream to teach full-time in a university. I have had the opportunity to do so in Cresson and Loretto PA, Baltimore, MD and Washington DC and have had the opportunity to take positions at other institutions (which I did not for various reasons). At the same time, I have always thought, and I have expressed this to my colleagues, especially those in moral theology, that they are at a disadvantage in that they do not have the opportunity for theology to be enfleshed in the lives of people as I have, being in full-time ministry always while I was (and am currently)teaching. The real lived experience of persons, in their joys and hopes, fears and anxieties, celebrations and disappointments give life to the theological mysteries that I have explored in countless volumes. Theology takes on flesh in persons...in you. Whether it be a Sunday Eucharist, a social gathering, a fundraising event, celebrations of a milestones (such as a baptism or funeral), a chance encounter in a parking lot or store, a telephone conversation, a one-on-one meeting, the celebration of reconciliation, or any of a number of rendezvous planned or unplanned, the forging of relationships (especially those with you over the past 10 years) has made me come to know Christ and his heart more intimately which is a true source of blessing. This foliage fills my autumnal entrance and for that I am most grateful.

On a different note, I have been struggling quite a bit with the gout that I have as a side-effect of the anti-rejection medications that I must take daily. I am on a new medication schedule; however, any positive results will most likely take a very long time. I ask for your continued prayers. To be honest, you brought me to where I am today through your prayers. I know that your petitioning to God will continue to be of great assistance.