

Msgr. Laurence R. Bronkiewicz
50th Ordination Anniversary Homily
Friday, June 23, 2023
St Mary Parish, Greenwich, CT

July in Rome can be very hot and humid. July 2, 1973, was no exception. With John and Tom who are here with me in the sanctuary, I started out from the North American College, making our way down the Gianiculum Hill, then taking a sharp left at the bottom onto a short street named after the Holy Spirit. Yes, we were on our way to the Basilica of St. Peter - that extraordinary church created by the genius of Bernini, Bramante, and Michelangelo among others. On that sultry July morning 16 members of our Class of 1973 gathered to be ordained priests of Jesus Christ by Bishop James Hickey, Rector of the North American College. This evening, almost 50 years later to the day, at the gracious invitation of my good friend, Fr. Michael Jones, we gather here in St. Mary Church, Greenwich, to celebrate 5 decades of my service as a priest of the Diocese of Bridgeport. In addition to all of you, I am so pleased that two close friends and classmates who walked to the Basilica with me that morning have joined us.

In the Gospel Matthew reminds us that where our treasure is, there also will our heart be. So let me speak from the heart. Yes, my journey as a priest began a long time ago, but the priest I am today is not the priest who walked out of St. Peter's after ordination on that July morning. Life after all is a journey. The priestly life is a journey of the heart and mind and soul. Traveling that journey changes the traveler. Happily, the priesthood is not a solitary journey. Yes, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit walk with us, and I've been so grateful to have known and felt God's grace in my priestly life, calling me to accept new challenges, to move into new places and picking me up when the going got tough. You know I can still recall sitting in a lecture hall at the Gregorian University in Rome, and listening to Fr. Frank Sullivan, SJ, describe the Church as "one complex reality." My brothers and sisters, each day of the last five decades has confirmed what an understatement that was.

My mind is also crowded with other memories - memories of important people who have touched my life in wonderful ways. Of course, I think of my Polish born father and Parisian mother who met during WWII - my dad was a Staff Sergeant in the army that liberated Paris. He and my mom met through a friend of hers. They married in a Paris suburb but only after meeting with the Papal Nuncio to France, the future Saint, Pope John XXIII, who had to give them permission to marry since my dad could not go back behind the Russian lines to Poland to get his baptismal certificate. I'm also thinking of the history of our Diocese, soon to mark its 70th anniversary. Our first 3 bishops come to mind - Bishop, later Cardinal Lawrence Sheehan who confirmed me in our Catholic faith at my home parish, St. Mary, Norwalk, and Bishop Walter Curtis who called me to priestly ordination and who first assigned me to work with our clergy and religious, and of course Bishop, later Cardinal Edward Egan whom I had the pleasure and privilege of assisting during his tenure in Bridgeport. Shortly after his installation I can still recall the third Leader of our Diocese telling me to be sure to always give him my honest opinion not what I thought he wanted to hear. And let me also mention Fr. Martin O'Connor, the now deceased pastor of St. Philip Parish in Norwalk - a man of remarkable wisdom and an ability to guide the priests assigned to him of which I was privileged to be one.

To my brother priests and other staff who served with me on the Formation Faculty of the North American College in Rome, especially Msgr. Charles Murphy, the Rector and my good friend, I can only say thank you, as well as to the scores of men from all over our nation whom I helped to prepare for the priesthood. Nor will I ever forget the dedicated men and women of our Diocesan Catholic Center to which I commuted for over 15 years. As I look back on the following 16 as Pastor of St Mary, Ridgefield, I am so grateful to the energetic and talented priests, religious and laity with whom I collaborated and the wonderful people of the parishes where I've been privileged to help out during the past several years – here at St. Mary on the Avenue, St. Catherine and St. Agnes, Holy Name in Stamford, and St. Joseph, Danbury.

Now, if you were to ask me at this stage in my life's journey, what is the heart of the priesthood, here is my answer. The heart of the priesthood is our personal relationship with God. That's what makes the priest tick and helps him to keep ticking. And that's what my brother priests and I ordained on July 2, 1973, prayed for as the Bishop asked God the Father to bless us with the Holy Spirit and to support the rest of our lives with unflinching love through Jesus Christ.

Now, have I always felt or sensed God's love? Honestly, no I haven't. None of us has. That is precisely what proves that our relationship with God is real. My brothers and sisters, all of our relationships have their ups and downs, times when we feel the love of others and other times when we feel very much alone. But God is not only in our feelings. God is so much bigger than our feelings can capture. In the course of our lives God speaks to us in so many different ways.

That I learned from a great saint of the Church to whom I have special devotion – Inigo Lopez de Onaz y Loyola – Ignatius of Loyola. And so, my final thank you goes to the Order he founded, the Society of Jesus, for helping me through my training in Ignatian spirituality to fall more deeply in love with our God who loves us more than we can imagine. To borrow the words of a former General of the Society, Fr. Pedro Arrupe, SJ:

“Nothing is more practical than finding God, than falling in love in a quite absolute final way. What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination, will affect everything. It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning, what you do with your evenings, how you spend your weekends, what you read, whom you know, what breaks your heart, and what amazes you with joy and gratitude. Fall in love, stay in love, and it will decide everything.”

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