

I'm really going to miss those geese . . .

Way back in March of 2019, I was on a jet headed for Baltimore for a meeting of the National Advisory Committee for the US Conference of Catholic Bishops. I had just departed my position as Vicar General to the Bishop and, before leaving office, he asked if I would represent the Diocese at this conference. Upon arrival I grabbed my luggage and boarded the transport bus to the hotel whereupon I received a text message from the Bishop, "*Greg, please call me when you get a moment.*" Such a call always gives a priest pause: "*I wonder what this is about.*"

Some weeks earlier one of our relatively young pastors, Fr. John Perry, suddenly passed away, leaving a vacancy at a large parish on Cape Cod. After consultation with the Personnel Board, the decision was made that I should be moved to take over that pastorate at Our Lady of Victory in Centerville.

Getting transferred is always a disruptive experience. But this transfer was going to be very different. Shortly after returning from Baltimore we went into full lockdown. And within the strangeness of the lockdown, I was left with a "neither here---neither there" sort of feeling. It took some months of mental and spiritual work to sort out my feelings about the whole situation. But, of course, there was lots of time for that during those early months of the pandemic.

By the time we got into the late spring, the Bishop decided to freeze all transfers until the following year. The result of this is that I got a full, one-year extension to remain here and to keep an eye on the progress of the Parish Hall project.

But now, the time has come when I must disclose to you that I am shipping out in August. Normally this would happen in June, but the Bishop extended it so that pastors might welcome back folks to Mass he hasn't seen in over a year, (at least this is how I understand the matter.)

In all, I will have been with you for 9 years. These have been some of the best years of my priesthood, and I want to express my gratitude to all of you for your loving support. I have experienced many kindnesses from so many and I will keep these experiences in my heart as I move on.

I acknowledge that I have made mistakes and, in some cases, caused offense. I beg pardon and forgiveness for these things. I share the same, wounded nature as you and I am a sinner in need of mercy. I hope that you can put all such matters in this context. I did the best I could with whatever I had to bring to bear. It has not been easy in the tumultuous, confusing cultural climate in which we are living.

But, whatever the case, for good or for bad, I leave it to you to do the post-mortem. As it is, we are only-ever just passing through. It isn't supposed to be about "me" or "us" as pastor/priests. But it is difficult to escape the power of personalities, whether attractive or repellant. The ideal is that we be wholeheartedly focused on Christ as "the way, the truth and the life." But that same Christ appoints weak and fallible men to be pastors. He appoints them to provide the voice to speak his Word, the touch by which He anoints the sick, the ears to hear words of contrition, and the voice to say "*You are forgiven. Go in Peace.*" Indeed, as I have oft repeated, the ideal is John the Baptist who says, "*I must decrease. He must increase.*" Or, better yet, it is Mary who says, "*My soul magnifies the Lord.*"



Taking my place as pastor here at SJN in August will be **Fr. John "Jack" Schrader**. Fr. Schrader is quite a bit younger than me and I know him to be a good, decent, and pious man. I hope that you will give him a warm welcome, and to receive him for who he is and the unique contribution he can make to this blessed community. We are all different, and the Lord works through these differences for our good.

I will not forget you. You will always have a special place in my heart and memory. Grace and Peace to you for all the years to come. And, no, I will not really miss those filthy geese.