

LEARNING

from others

*By Very Reverend Glenn Jones, Vicar General,
Vicar for Clergy, Vicar for Religious*

Happy New Year everybody! All the clergy and staff of the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, parishes, religious orders, etc., all pray for a blessed year for all of you. May God bring healing and peace to all those who need it most especially. And make it a point to pray for vocations!—both to religious orders and ordained clergy.

Here in the archdiocese—as in many other dioceses around the U.S.—we have quite a number of non-native-born priests—from Vietnam, Mexico and Latin America, Spain, and Africa, to name just a few places of origin (not even to mention myself, originally from Texas, which *sort* of counts. And, by the way: I ain't got no accent; it's *y'all* that talk funny! ;)

Anyway...the archbishop hosted a dinner at his house recently, with dinner prepared by our Nigerian priests...and a most enjoyable evening we all had. It wasn't so much the food they had prepared (though it was quite good), but rather their interactions both with one another and with we native-borns present.

If you've never been in a house with a number of Nigerians singing full-throatedly and with abandon, I highly recommend the experience—the joy, the openness, the joy of singing songs from childhood in perfect unison, key and harmony. The apparent momentary release from our own American societally-enforced cultural reserve. The notable moment when the eldest of the group began to speak...and the others immediately fall silent: that respect for elders that we have much lost. I couldn't help but recall in the moment: *"The glory of young men is their strength, but the beauty of old men is their gray hair [the wisdom that comes from decades of life experience]."* (Proverbs 20:29)

And this does not even speak to our brothers' readiness of service—preparing the meal, and, unbidden, washing dishes, clearing the table, moving furniture as necessary—seeing a need and leaping to fulfill it. Such service may seem to some almost trivial in such a setting, but it speaks of the heart's attitude, and we remember Jesus: *"He who is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much..."* (Luke 16:10) In our day and place of the incessant protestation of "It's not my job!" and rampant self-centeredness, these good men—along with many others from other nations—rather came to an unfamiliar land to truly live in the mode of Christ, proclaiming with actions rather than empty words, of coming *"...not to be served, but to serve..."* (Matthew 20:28)

"Service" is a theme that weighs heavily in all hearts—hearts lightened when we DO serve, and—even if unconsciously (or "un-conscience-ly")—burdened when we do not. After all, we are innately social creatures...interdependent...none of us an island. Even the hardy mountain men of old depended upon each other, the blacksmith, the gunsmith, the weaver. Imagine an ant gathering for itself alone...a bee gathering for itself alone. Easily conquered...easily undone. The old adage applies about a single stick being broken easily, but grouped together have greater strength. How much more does that apply to the universal and world-wide Church?

When we think of service our minds often leap to the military and first responders. We honor these on Memorial and Veterans Days—times in which our nation recognizes especially those who have served their nation in its Armed Forces, but also by extension all those who risk their lives for the

service of others. When one puts on the uniform of a police officer or firefighter, or the uniform of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, or Coast Guard... they take up the mantle of service to others... to strangers—knowing that it may even be to the sacrifice of their lives. Also doctors, nurses, EMTs... exposing themselves to hazardous and possibly even deadly contagion daily...seeking to heal the pain of others. And goodness knows that teachers don't go into that profession for a lucrative salary!... and yet they, perhaps more than most others, serve our future in what and how well they teach.

In that aforementioned evening, I could not help but muse about that which our African brethren have yet retained, and what we have largely forfeited—closeness, civility, mutual service... their joy in simply being together exercising their shared cultural experience. While our modern technological prowess has advanced humanity in myriad ways, has it necessarily come at the cost of such personal interaction and relationships? One cannot help but think so when one sees whole families in restaurants with all heads bowed—not in prayer, but looking at their phones: the modern idolatry. Must it be so? Even in familial

conversation resides service: the affirmation of love and support.

While our African priests may not know each other well, neither are they strangers; rather, in that shared joy of mutual presence they find true brotherhood (*"Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!"* (Psalm 133:1)) So, while "social" media and various stimuli of society may tend to drive apart, we must never forget our shared humanity...that nothing can replace personal and present (and kind!) human interaction and cooperation. None of us IS an island, but we are all ON an island...and life is so much better when we are simply kind and considerate to one another. Someone said as much about 2000 years ago; now...who was that again?

*"O come, O come Emmanuel..."
 No man is an island,
 Entire of itself.
 Each is a piece of the continent,
 A part of the main.
 If a clod be washed away by the sea,
 Europe is the less.
 As well as if a promontory were.
 As well as if a manor of thine own
 Or of thine friend's were.
 Each man's death diminishes me,
 For I am involved in mankind..."*
 (John Donne: "For Whom the Bell Tolls")