

From the Pastor—June 3, 2018

Gage County Day Last Friday, May 25, was a day filled with activity. The day began with morning Mass and then hitting the road to attend a funeral in Beatrice. Our diocesan parish priest at Beatrice, Father Robert Barnhill, suffered the loss of his dad, Kenneth. In fact, Kenneth Barnhill was in the hospital in the next-door room when my dad, Kenneth Grell, broke his hip last November. Mr. Barnhill had further declined after his hospitalization. He was living in the memory care unit in the same Good Samaritan facility that my dad resided in for five months. Ken Barnhill and his wife, JoAnn, raised their two daughters (born first) followed by seven sons on a farm south of Barneston near the Nebraska-Kansas state line. All these years, Mr. Barnhill had not been Catholic, but went to Mass every week. Father Bob had the privilege to bring his dad into the Catholic Church through Holy Communion and Confirmation about a week before he died. I went to school at Wymore Southern with a couple of Father Barnhill's younger brothers. They had come to Wymore after the school in Barneston closed in the early '80's. So the funeral, being in my home parish and filled with familiar faces from southern Gage County, was quite moving to me. About fifty priests attended the Mass and concelebrated in St. Joseph Church. *** After the funeral Mass and dinner, I went to our family farm for a few hours. Mom and Dad had attended the funeral, too. My dad tires somewhat easily...at 90 years old, I can't say I can fault his endurance! It was good to be at home and see a couple of new kitties who have been born. Also, Dad wanted me to see the little soybean seedlings emerging from the drilled disk-gaps in our creek-bottom "eighty". Drilling beans is not the way of planting that I grew up with. In the late '80's, the newest equipment featured "air planters". I would help inoculate the beans, making myself a mess and in sore need of cleaning up when I arrived back home! I was a kid, in blue jeans and t-shirt, so I didn't mind it all! Our corn at home looks good, and as I write this, Dad is happy for about an inch of rain this past week from our good God upon our ground. *** So, from my parents' home, I shoved back out into the real world again to attend the diaconate ordinations in Lincoln. It was a grand time (read more below). *** By the time I arrived back in Aurora on Friday evening, it had been a huge day, but a good one!

Ordination Experience I am attempting to not get caught up in superlative speech as much as I seem prone to, but I think without exaggeration I can say that this year's ordination Masses were on the hottest days I have ever seen. Thankfully, the air conditioning at the Cathedral of the Risen Christ was working well! Our diocese was fortunate to have these young men ordained, three as deacons and two as priests. We will gain another deacon who is going to school in Rome, to make a priesthood class of four for 2019. *** As dozens and dozens of us priests walked up the aisle for the Masses, one thought that came to me (and this might sound odd) is that we were going up to the altar to die. The way I mean this is in such a way that applies to all of us, whenever we approach Holy Communion. We are approaching the altar to die with Jesus so as to live with Jesus. Indeed, by our baptism, we die by submersion (or poured water) and then

rise to new life by coming out of the water. Does this make sense? And we as priests, as we approach the altar and reverence it, the altar symbolizes Christ, whom we kiss. As we as priests say "This is my Body, this is my blood", we are called to imitate the Body and Blood of Jesus as It commingles with the mortal, sinful bodies and blood of our own persons. It is a mystery, sublime to consider, but it is so true, so good, and the only thing that we really can count on in this life. God is good, and He proves it at the altar at every Mass. There is also a sense of dying as a priest approaches the altar caused by the anti-Christian society in which we live. In so many cases in modern history, anti-Christian governments attempt to silence priests because they want to destroy Catholicism. Archbishop Oscar Romero in El Salvador was assassinated as he celebrated Holy Mass in 1981. That is not so far away and not so long ago. Romero will be canonized a saint later this year. I don't intend to be a martyr, nor would I be brave enough to face such a prospect, but I would ask for the grace to do God's holy will. *** The ordinations were beautiful to experience! Bishop Conley preached about Pope St. John Paul's book, Gift and Mystery, which he wrote on the occasion of his 50th anniversary as a priest in 1996. I hope the bishop's homily will be on our diocesan web site in coming days.

Memorial Day at the Cemetery While the afternoon of Memorial Day brought substantial rainfall, Memorial Day morning was great for our outdoor Holy Mass at the Aurora Cemetery. We set up our outdoor altar close by the access road and underneath a huge shade tree. I was pleased with the turnout, but no matter the numbers, to be with the beloved dead was powerful to all of us gathered there. With my sensitive body thermostat, I did ok. I prayed for all our beloved dead at Mass.

Spirit Catholic Radio News I am on the Spirit Catholic Radio morning prayer segment these coming weekdays, three times each morning at 7:10, 8:10, and 10:15. *** The Shrines of the North pilgrimage is looking to be at about its capacity of 50 people. It will be held August 1-5. I will be away for a few days, but will be praying for you all at many holy places in Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. The pilgrimage is a kick-off to the 20th anniversary of Spirit Catholic Radio first hitting the airwaves on January 9, 1999. This radio station is truly amazing; please tune in as much as you can, at 91.5 FM which is received well on car radios and better and better as you drive toward Grand Island.

Bishop's Anniversary I was blessed to attend Bishop Conley's 10th anniversary Mass. For those of who were able (on short notice) to contribute to His Excellency's spiritual bouquet, it was impressive to hear Father Rayer recite all of the prayers received from across the Diocese. Please be faithful to the prayers you promised. Several bishops were present, including Bishop Joseph Hanefeldt of Grand Island and Archbishop Charles Chaput of Philadelphia. Bishop Conley's mother (age 90) was also present; his dad is deceased. Bishop baptized and confirmed his parents into the Catholic Church when he was a young priest in Wichita. You may recall that he converted to be Catholic while in college at KU.

God Bless You!

Father Grell