

From the Pastor—April 4, 2021

Chrism Mass It certainly was good to be together as priests for the Chrism Mass. Unfortunately, I experienced a flat tire on my way into Lincoln that day. Oh, I was so disheartened when the tire sensor alerted me of the trouble! I pulled off, safely, into a gas station parking lot. I have roadside assistance through my vehicle, and this worked great. I should have arrived at the Cathedral at 1:30 p.m.; instead, I arrived at a little before 4:00. The Mass was at 5:00, so I was plenty in time for that. *** The oils for anointing of the sick and the catechumens are blessed at this Mass, as well as the chrism oil. These oils are then distributed throughout the diocese to us priests who will use them to provide the sacraments. *** The Chrism Mass is also considered the anniversary of priesthood for all of us priests. We renewed our priestly promises on Monday. *** In addition, our diocese recognizes priests celebrating jubilee anniversaries the Chrism Mass. I was one of those priests this year! My classmates and I are at 25 years of being ordained. It was odd to think of this rather lengthy journey which has really flown by. I was ordained with Fathers Brouillette (Hastings Catholic Schools), Birkel (Fairbury and Alexandria), and Dietrich (Lincoln St. Mary's) on May 25, 1996. After the Mass, a priest banquet is held and speeches are given by the jubilarians. I am posting my speech here:

“My dad prayed to St. Anne that I would become a priest. He named me, Loras, after the Bishop of Rockford, the Most Rev. Loras T. Lane, making my becoming a priest providential. Dad teased me, even as he prayed devoutly, about becoming a priest. As a child, I didn't much like the thought of such a thing, so Dad called it becoming a “minister”, to tone down his rhetoric a bit. The Gospel passage of Jesus being lost in the Temple on St. Joseph's feast day made me recall an incident in teenage years. I wanted to play on the Legion baseball team out of Wymore, and I asked Dad about it. He said, “No, son, I could use you on the farm to help out.” Dad had built such a relationship with me that I obeyed him without pouting. That obedience, by God's grace and in the image of Jesus obeying Mary and Joseph in their home at Nazareth, was a stepping-stone to being a priest. After my Dad prayed and prayed for me to be a priest, when I was finally ordained, I was not off the hook. He said, “Loras, be a good priest.”

I am blessed to have my parents still this side of paradise. Mom is 85, Dad 93. My sister, brother, and I prayed every day as a family. Priests were dear to us; Dad talked often about Msgr. Ferdinand Mock and his long pastorate at St. Joseph, Beatrice. Mother, similarly, recalled her childhood priest at St. Mary, Odell, Father Francis Cadek. Father Thomas Dailey was at their wedding; Father Danko, my childhood priest in Beatrice, hunted on our land; Father Peter Gadiant, who my Dad thought of as the priest of all priests; and Father Dennis Hotovy, who taught me catechism in high school at Wymore. Both my parents were confirmed by Bishop Kucera, so I love the connectedness and historicity of our diocese my parents passed on.

Bishop Flavin was a huge influence upon me. I saw him, met him, in Wymore when the new church and hall were dedicated there in the late '70's. He confirmed me at St. Joseph, Beatrice, in 1979; I felt a spiritual surge as I stood and walked away from him that day as a little 5th grader. Later, Bishop Flavin would speak words at a Newman Center retreat which just froze me into my seat for an extended period. Those of us who entered seminary when I joined

were Bishop Flavin's last “class” before his retirement. I remember my interview with him at the Chancery vividly, him telling me that the priesthood is “a great life.” And that, if he had to go back 50 years and start over again, he would do it in an instant. Later in seminary time, I would help Bishop Flavin move from his temporary residence at 5720 A Street while his tornado-damaged home at Denton was repaired. I also was honored to serve as deacon at his funeral Mass of Christian burial.

Our ordinandi retreat was given by Father John (now Bishop) Folda. Something came to me from one of his talks that has echoed again and again. It is, “God, why do you love me so much?” I think this meditation represents the culmination of many events of my life up to ordination, for outside of my family, I didn't always fit in. With my classmates in elementary school, I am better friends now than I was then; in junior and senior high I felt like a square peg; I loved my studies at UN-L but the social life was not the right fit...until I was embraced by the Newman Center. Then, “why do you love me so much?” manifested itself by meeting the seminarians, some of you here present as brothers today, some who discerned out of seminary but impacted me greatly nonetheless. They, and my Newman Center friends, made me feel wanted, they included me, they loved me. I knew God's love as never before. I felt the love, too, of Serra Club families, from priests I met, and to this day from the people in the places I have served, holy sheep—difficult sheep—in-between sheep...I have experienced again and again the reverence of people toward their priests, toward ME. “Why, do you, love ME, so much?”

My spiritual director for the majority of these 25 years was the late Msgr. Myron Pleskac. His homilies at the Pink Sisters when I was a sem greatly influenced me. He was so patient! One example of his help was when I couldn't decide at Lawrence if I should give the “go” for a ginormous project to replace the roof at Sacred Heart Church. So many factors played in, I learned more about French Ludowici ceramic tile, and how to properly install it, then I ever cared to! Monsignor, not too often departing from his evenness of temperament, said to me, “You either don't decide to do it...or you say ‘I AM going to do it!’.” Monsignor was in awe in his own life of a renewal, deep conversion he experienced with SINE/Light of the Word retreats. I saw him as so holy and close to the Lord, but THAT experience, I could tell, took him to a new level. That experience for him came in his “second” 25 years; while I have been given plenty of graces and conversions and renewals in my first 25, I can't help but hope and pray that, like Msgr. Pleskac, the Lord has many conversion experiences planned for me, and for each one of us, in this beautiful life of the holy priesthood.”

Please know of my Easter prayers. Jesus Christ is risen from the dead! We are made new in Him!

God Bless You!!!

Father Grell