

ONE PRIEST’S JOYS AND SORROWS

In the last issue of *Cross Links*, I shared a little bit of my vocation story...how I ended up in Holy Cross, how God lead me to specific ministries over the years, what I’ve come to value, etc. While wondering what to write for the second part, I happened to preside at the Eucharist for the residents of St. Paul’s Retirement community on September 3rd, the memorial of St. Gregory the Great. The Opening Prayer for the mem-orial closed with these words: “*May the growth of your people in holiness be the eternal joy of our shepherds.*”

As soon as I prayed that, I knew what the next reflection would be: the joys and sorrows of the priesthood. Thank you, Holy Spirit. Now please realize that these are *my* joys and sorrows. I suspect many are shared by my brother priests, but each individual would have his own unique things to add.

That Opening Prayer truly does capture what is my single greatest joy: helping others grow in holiness. For me, that’s what it’s all about. It’s not buildings erected, monies raised or collected, long lines for confession, numbers of people at Mass, number of baptisms and weddings, and so on. I feel benchmarks like those are a poor way to calculate the value of one’s priestly ministry. For some, they might work; but I can’t do it that way.

Holiness for me is not saintliness, or sinlessness, or hours spent in prayer or good works. For one thing, we’ll never be sinless this side of heaven. Prayer and good works are part of any good person’s life. I believe “growth in holiness” means growth in self-acceptance – humbly and gratefully accepting who I am at this moment, realizing that my all-too-human imperfections are the very essence of holiness because they can lead me right into God’s arms. Holiness is knowing that I am God’s dearly beloved and that nothing I do will ever separate me from that love. It’s being able to see how God is at work in my life, and then being quick to respond to that presence with gratitude, awe, wonder.... and yes, sometimes even with honest anger and frustration. I’ve tried to let these values color and flavor my listening, preaching, and writing.

In order to help others in their growth, I have to tend to my own; after all, Jesus did say love your neighbor as yourself. That’s why, in the last newsletter, I mentioned

the absolute necessity of taking time for prayer and reflection. I constantly tell seminarians that taking this time is the single most important thing they can do for the people they serve. Good ministry de-mands times of not being available to others so that I can be available to Jesus and the Spirit.

What are some of my other joys? It’s a huge privilege to lead the folks in prayer, especially at Mass. I love gazing at the assembled community and seeing the catholicity of the Church in all its individual richness and uniqueness. To this day the iconic image of what the Church is all about was seeing a local bank president and his family sitting in a pew behind a woman who was a housekeeper in his bank, sharing the meal, singing together, exchanging the Greeting of Peace. In no other place than Mass would they have ever come together!

Baptism and weddings are lots of fun, especially when it comes to my family. I’m now baptizing the children of the children I baptized, or whose weddings I witnessed – it makes me a spiritual grandpa. I should also mention the RCIA programs I’ve worked with...oh man, what a celebration the Easter Vigil is as we bring to fruition the faith journey of the candidates.

Funerals can be joyful events, as we truly celebrate the goodness of the deceased person’s life – I think for example, of Martha Crimmins, whose family had balloons and flowers all over church. It was just pure Martha! Or they can be the saddest moments possible...such as meeting the funeral director in potter’s field along with the backhoe operator. A cardboard box is the casket for the deceased, and a cement slab with a number is his/her headstone.

I find great joy in the generosity of folks, their willingness to help out with the nitty-gritty stuff so that our Church and parishes might flourish. The parish staffs, the sacristans, the housekeepers and cooks, those who volunteer for work on the committees, the councils, the bazaars, the religious ed and school teachers, the choir members and music directors, the money-counters, the custodians. No one ever gets rich working for the Catholic Church, so I know a deeper motive of ministry impels these folks to work for our good as they do.

Knowing that one has made a difference in others’ lives is yet another great joy. By the same token, knowing that I made a *negative* difference in someone’s life is a deep sorrow. The latter was rarely deliberate. It was more a case of foot-in-mouth, laziness, self-righteousness, a know-it-all hubris, or selfishness in protecting personal time and space. One makes amends as one can...but still....

In addition to the hurt I’ve done, there are three other things that cause deep sorrow.

First, intransigence. I get totally frustrated and angry when folks cannot and will not listen to each other. Many have been the town hall or one-on-one meetings where some policy or change was introduced or explained, and there were those who loudly, vehemently, and continuously expressed their disagreement and opposition. The Holy Spirit has given everyone a piece of the truth, and unity depends on *both* sharing *and* acceptance. Shouting matches are a sign that the grace of the Holy Spirit is *NOT* being accepted and used. One tries to listen and be accommodating, but eventually there comes a point when all a person can do is follow the advice of Jesus to his apostles: “If a town or village will not hear you, shake the dust off your feet and move on.” In other words, sometimes a pastor or administrator will simply have to say “Enough! It’s going to be this way.”

Closely following on this is what I perceive to be the unwillingness of religious leadership to listen to the wisdom and lived experience of ordinary folks. There all-too-often seems to be an attitude – present among clergy *and* laity – that the Holy Spirit speaks only to clergy appointed or elected to high office. I know many of my brother priests share a sadness and pessimism about this. One recounted a story told by Richard Rohr of how in 1917 all the hierarchy of Russia gathered together to discuss what color stole should be used at Benediction, when outside the Russian Revolution was raging. There’s a reason that one of the fastest-growing religious groups in the United States is fallen-away Catholics.

I’m not saying leadership is totally responsible for this. No way...it takes two to tango. My desire for leadership to take the folks seriously is leavened with the knowledge that I have an obligation to responsibly listen to those who have the charism of leadership, instead of

automatically dismissing them as out-of-touch fuddy-duddies.

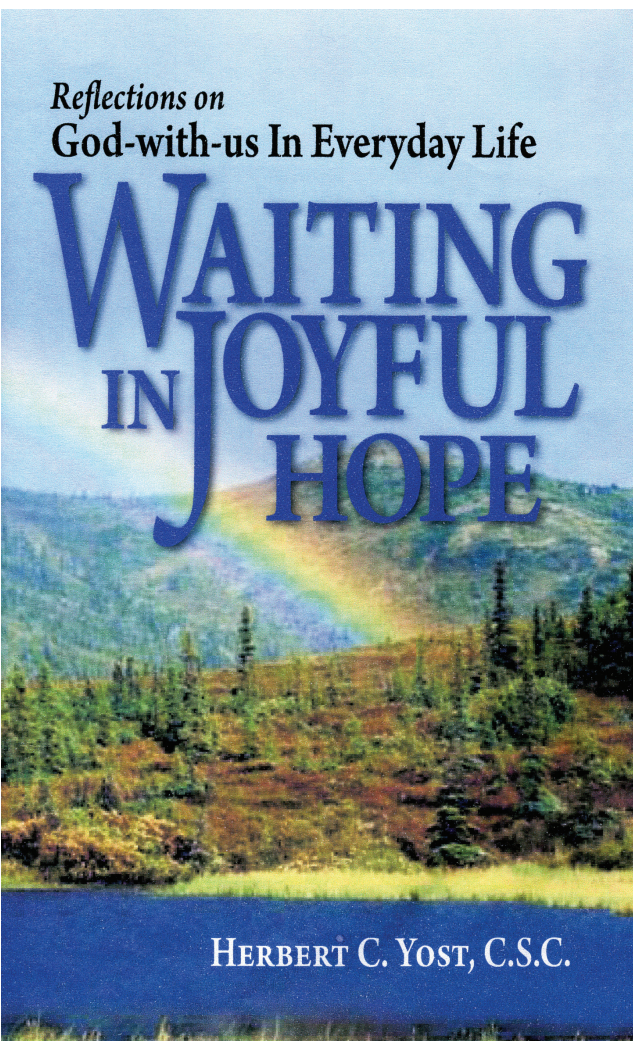
A third sorrow comes when I think of people who have been deeply hurt or driven away from the Church by clerical attitudes and behavior. The pedophilia scandal is an obvious example. Someone recently told me that she did not become Catholic because when she and her husband went to have their child baptized, the priest said the child was illegitimate because they had been married civilly.

The local Diocese used to have what was called Mercy Day, a day set aside when all parish priests would be available to talk with anyone who wished to return to the church. At dinner that night, Fr. Mike told us of a gal he had talked with who went to confession years ago and confessed an abortion. The priest said: “If I had a gun right now, I’d shoot you.”

A benefactor recently wrote and said her son and daughter-in-law were coming back to the Church. She expressed the hope that their parish priest would be compassionate. Why in the name of God would she have to express that hope in the first place?!

The above sorrows could easily be summarized by reflecting on the largeness or smallness of one’s world, the wideness or narrowness of one’s vision, whether one sees change and difference as a threat or a promise. A great part of my joy in assisting others in their growth in holiness is watching their world expand, seeing their hearts take on the immensity of Jesus’ heart, seeing their fears turning to a hope-full and faith-full realization that indeed God is faithful. It’s seeing them realize that the Church is not a fortress to be defended, but a home from which we can sally forth into the wideness of God’s mercy and goodness. Really, this is what resurrection is all about!

I yearn for full fruition of those words from the prayer in the opening paragraph of this reflection. Please, Father, Jesus, divine Spirit, please help us be all that we can be. Grant us priests who cherish life in all its fullness. Grant relief to those who are exhausted, who have a hard time seeing the fruits of their ministry. And above all, gracious Spirit, grant us many more men and women willing to serve your people, the Body of Christ.



The Wait is Over!

Fr. Herb’s first book, *Waiting in Joyful Hope*, is being released this month.

This wonderful collection of reflections, timelessly relevant, offers comfort, insight, encouragement, and always, hope.

For your own faith journey, or for someone you know in need of Fr. Herb’s wisdom, you can advance-order your copy today. Christmas delivery guaranteed for orders received by December 15th.

Please, Print Clearly

Name:	_____
Mailing Address:	_____
City / State / Zip:	_____
Telephone:	_____ Fax: _____
E-mail:	_____

Please send me _____ copies of *Waiting in Joyful Hope* @ \$19.95 each = \$ _____

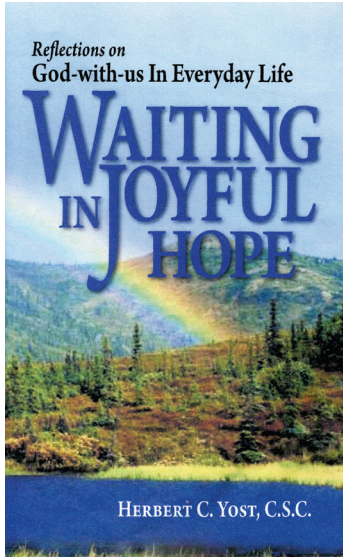
Add shipping & handling (books are shipped U.S. Post Office Priority Mail): + \$ _____

1 - 2 Books add \$5.50 3 - 4 Books add \$11.50 5 or more add \$15.50
--

Total Order: \$ _____
☐ My check is enclosed (make checks payable to: Holy Cross Association).

☐ Please bill by credit card (Mastercard/Visa/Discover)

Card Number	Exp. Date	3 Digit CVV Number
Signature		



From the preface of *Waiting in Joyful Hope* by noted author Fr. Nicholas Ayo, C.S.C.

"The human story is the same for everyone. We are born unasked; we yearn for great love and happiness even if we do not know we do. We die, both sad to leave and glad to be gone. Only the details of each human life differ. The essays of Father Herb Yost, C.S.C., that follow this Preface are for the human being in every man and woman who lives here and now. We are part of a great band of pilgrims whirling through space on planet earth at breath-taking speeds, but all too often only going around in circles seemingly getting nowhere. Why did God make me? It is a question I remember from childhood catechism. And I recall the answer. "God made me to know him and to love him in this world, and to be happy with him forever in the next." Fr. Yost's essays are but commentary on that line, plain talk for simple folk, and earned wisdom for everyone about Christian living."

And from one of Fr. Herb’s long-time readers

"I have been receiving and reading Holy Cross Crosslinks newsletter for about ten years now, and I look forward to the arrival of each issue.

The 'reflection' that Fr. Herb writes in each issue is aptly named.....in each case, it's his own personal reflection as he writes it, but then always prompts another introspective 'reflection' of my own as I read it.

Fr. Herb, more than any writer I know, is very adept in relating God’s view of mankind to modern times and modern situations. I find his Reflections to be always relevant to human living today and to everything that’s happening in the world, and I find them very easy to relate to my own personal life (reading the Old Testament just doesn’t cut it for me in that regard).

These are always hopeful and uplifting messages, arriving in a modern life filled with globally serious problems that leave a large percentage of humans in the world with a sense of utter hopelessness and despair. His Reflections have helped me personally to work through serious problems in my own life (deaths of loved ones, a painful divorce, family illnesses and financial difficulties). I’ve found comfort in reading them and then reflecting myself.....they have always helped me to correctly recalibrate my internal compass and get my head back on straight."

Joe G from Charlotte NC

Your Favorite Page.....

- PROOFREADING IS A DYING ART!
- Something Went Wrong in Jet Crash, Expert Says. Wow...what a logical conclusion.
- Police Begin Campaign to Run Down Jaywalkers Now that’s taking things a bit far.
- Miners Refuse to Work After Death. No good for nuthin’ lazy so and so’s
- Juvenile Court to Try Shooting Defendant Wonder if that’ll work better than a fair trial?
- War Dims Hope For Peace I can see where it might have that effect.
- If Strike Isn’t Settled Quickly, It May Last Awhile Ya think so?
- Cold Wave Linked To Temperatures Who would have thought it?
- Enfield Couple Slain; Police Suspect Homicide They may be on to something there!
- Red Tape Holds Up Bridges You mean there’s something stronger than duct tape?
- Man Struck By Lightning; Faces Battery Charge He probably IS the battery charge!
- New Study of Obesity Looks For Larger Test Group Weren’t they fat enough?
- Astronaut Takes Blame For Gas in Spacecraft That musta been the beans he ate.
- Kids Make Nutricious Snacks Wonder if they taste like chicken?
- Hospitals Are Sued By Seven Foot Doctors Whoa Nellie...those are big dudes!
- Typhoon Rips Through Cemetery; Hundreds Dead Did I read that right?

Some Senior personal ads seen in Florida newspapers:

“Sexy, fashion-conscious blue-haired beauty, 80’s, slim, 5’4’ (used to be 5’6’), searching for sharp-looking, sharp-dressing companion. Matching white shoes and belt a plus.”

“Recent widow who has just buried fourth husband, and am looking for someone to round out a six-unit plot. Dizziness, fainting, shortness of breath not a problem.

“I am into solitude, long walks, sunrises, the ocean, yoga and meditation. If you are the silent type, let’s get together, take our hearing aids out and enjoy quiet times.”

“Active grandmother with original teeth seeking a dedicated flosser to share rare steaks, corn on the cob and caramel candy.”

“I still like to rock, still like to cruise in my Camaro on Saturday nights and still like to play the guitar. If you were a groovy chick, or are now a groovy hen, let’s get together and listen to my eight-track tapes.”

“I can usually remember Monday through Thursday. If you can remember Friday, Saturday and Sunday, let’s put our two heads together.”

“Male, 1932, high mileage, good condition, some hair, many new parts including hip, knee, cornea, valves. Isn’t in running condition, but walks well.”

CREDIT CARD INFORMATION

NAME: _____

ZIP CODE: _____

☐ Visa ☐ MasterCard ☐ Discover

Amount you wish to give: _____

Card Number: _____

Expiration Date: _____

Signature: _____

☐ *If you wish us to keep this credit card info on file, check the box.*

October 10, 2009

Greetings, my friend!

Well, this page is the last piece of writing I have to do before heading to North Carolina for a couple weeks vacation with my folks. The reflection inside and the 4th page are done.....Jim Kramer has been working on the book order form...somehow it'll all come together and the result is what you hold in your hands now. These news-letters really are a cooperative effort. Carol and Kim address the envelopes, Ave Marie Press does the newsletter printing, Duley Press did the All Souls memorial cards, Lightning Litho prints the envelopes themselves, a mailing company does the inserting, the Post Office brings this to your mailbox, benefactors send me the page 4 laffs, and the Holy Spirit helps me with the inside reflection. A lot of people (and one Dove) worked to produce this newsletter.

Thanks for all the good comments on the last newsletter (a reflection on my vocation as a priest). It caught me by surprise. Maybe it's because folks are not all that familiar with the inner workings of a priest's life, of how he gets called, etc. Since Pope Benedict declared this to be the Year for Priests, these reflections are my way of fulfilling his desires. What you'll find inside are some reflections on my joys and sorrows as a priest. These are just general categories...obviously, there are lots more joys and sorrows that would take several volumes to fill.

And speaking of volumes (how d'ya like that segue!!!!), order lots of books, OK? I'm dreaming in my own very humble way of the Nobel and the Pulitzer and the other biggies!! Seriously, this was an interesting undertaking. What really surprised me (and continues to surprise me) is how nervous I am about the whole thing. Can't figure out why. Maybe some of you who remember your fist book can enlighten me.

Back to priesthood for a second. One thing I omitted in the last newsletter was the Final Profession and Diaconate Ordination of **Gerry Olinger, CSC**, and **Kevin Grove, CSC**. This took place on August 29 and 30. They will be ordained to the priesthood on the Saturday after Easter.

There is one new member of the Development Office, and a very important one at that. **Mr. Terry Morrow** has been appointed Director of Development. Terry brings a wide range of experience to this work. All of us know Terry well, and are happy to be working with him.

One other huge change I forgot to mention in the last newsletter. At the Provincial Chapter in June, it was unanimously approved that the Eastern Province of Priests would merge with the Indiana Province in 2010. This will result in one United States Province of Priests. This was one of the reasons for Terry's appointment.

And now, of course, comes another reason for this newsletter: the November Remembrances of your loved ones who have died. If you would like us to wrap our prayers around yours, jot the names of your beloved dead on the prayer card and return it to us. No offering is required, but should you choose to include one, know that it will be deeply appreciated. It will be used for our education and health care needs of the oldest and young-est members of the Holy Cross community.

Running out of space now. I'd make the type smaller, but then we older folks would have a difficult time reading it. Can't have that! Carol and Kim, plus Jim, Terry, Nancy, and Beata join me in wishing you all the best, and in thanking you for your gracious generosity in these difficult economic times. You folks are something else again!!!

Pray faithfully, laugh often, love deeply!