

8<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter  
June 12, 2011  
Fr. Tom Elliott

## Anniversary Reflections

Acts of the Apostles 2:1-11  
Psalm 104  
1 Corinthians 12:3b-7, 12-13  
John 20:19-23

Every year, on the weekend nearest my anniversary of ordination to the priesthood, I take time to reflect on what the gift of priesthood has meant to me and what God has been doing in my life in the past year. Today, I celebrate my twelfth anniversary to the priesthood and my seventh anniversary as pastor of Christ the King Catholic Church. For the last couple of weeks, I've enjoyed reflecting on what these anniversaries mean to me.

I am the youngest of three children. As the youngest kid, I remember wanting to share in the activities of my older brother and sister. I looked up to them and wanted to be involved in whatever they were involved in. Now, after all of these years, God is inviting me to, once again, be the youngest, but in a new way.

Our Diocese is blessed with many wonderful and faithful priests. In the past few years, however, I've become more and more aware of a small group of priests who are making a particular and important difference in our Diocese. They don't belong to any particular organization; not all of them hold special positions in our Diocese; they are not a clique. They simply have a *quality* about them that is transforming our Diocese. These men are extraordinarily prayerful, selfless, pastoral, and loving. In fact, I've even seen their *mere presence* minister to people. Some of you have met these guys and know what I'm talking about.

Over the course of the last couple of years, I've had opportunities to minister alongside these priests, serving with them in various capacities. It's been a humbling and inspiring experience. It's stirred up a deep desire within me to be *more selfless and loving*. It has helped to begin moving me from being a *disciple* of Jesus Christ to being an *apostle*—one sent to others to share the Good News. As I've reflected on how these priests have blessed and inspired me and let me share in their ministry, I've felt, once again, like the youngest. God has used that feeling to invite me to reflect on Saint John the Apostle, who was the youngest among the Apostles.

Reflecting on the various Scripture passages about John, as well as reading the verses written by him or his disciples, has provide me with a lot of material for prayer. In particular, the first letter of John was meaningful to me, because it describes the gift of love.

Love is something that I've learned a lot about from other priests in our Diocese. I've also learned a lot about love from all of you. I arrived here seven years ago fairly guarded and still trying to figure out my identity as a priest and pastor. I often disguised my ego as a zeal for Christ and my perfectionism as a zeal for souls. Thanks to your patience with me and love for me, I am more comfortable in my identity as a priest and I'm able to love more authentically.

It is with a heart full of gratitude for what God has done in my life and priesthood, as well as gratitude for who you've been to me these past seven years, that I tell you that I am being transferred to another parish. There is a priest in our Diocese that is having a hard time right now and our bishop is moving him in order to make sure that he gets the healing that he needs. That move has caused a chain-reaction of unexpected transfers throughout the Diocese and I am one of them. Effective August 16th, I will be pastor of Immaculate Conception in North Little Rock.

I was at my house when the bishop called to tell me about the transfer. After I got off the phone with him, I went to the chapel. As I sat there, tears quickly came. However, to my surprise, the tears were not predominantly tears of grief or tears of joy, but rather, they were tears of gratitude—gratitude for all of you and for the time that I've had here at Christ the King. The last seven years have been life-changing and very meaningful for me.

One of the greatest consolations I have about being moved is that your new pastor is one of those priests I mentioned earlier. His name is Father Kevin Atunzu. He is an *exceptional* priest and is making a beautiful and profound impact on our Diocese. I'm sure I'll have several opportunities to share with you some stories about him throughout the summer, but let me just say that he is a prayerful and faith-filled man. He and I share a love for Saint Ignatius of Loyola and spiritual direction. I know that he'll be a perfect fit here.

Please know that all of you will be in my prayers in a special way in the upcoming months as we all go through this transition. As you can imagine, I am going to be extraordinarily busy these next two months, tying up as many loose ends as possible and getting things packed. I will make every effort to ensure that the transition is as smooth as possible for you, the staff, and Fr. Kevin.

#### **SUGGESTED PRAYER EXERCISE:**

-  In the Gospel of John, the Apostle John is referred to as the disciple “whom Jesus loved.” Read John 13:20-25. Imagine yourself as the Apostle John. What stirs in your heart as you lean against the chest of Jesus?