

From the Pastor

February 7, 2010

5th Sunday
in Ordinary Time



Retired Priests. Some say a 'retired priest' is an oxymoron or impossible combination of words as in jumbo-shrimp, silent-scream, or serious-joke. Or it's a contradiction of terms: how can I retire if, by the Sacrament of Holy Orders, I became "a priest forever in the line of Melchizedek?" [Genesis 14:18; Psalm 110:1-4; Hebrews 5:6-10, 6:20, and 7:1-21.] Others [I hope jokingly] say a 'retired priest' is a redundant statement since priests do no work, ergo the rhythmic saying, "A priest's hands are meant for chalices not calluses!" Some from my 'past life' or 'working days' did send me 'On Your Retirement' cards at my Ordination!

In the 'good old days' before the 1960's Second Vatican Council and the 1983 revised Code of Canon Law, priests expected to 'die with their boots on' - and pastors 'died in the saddle.' As many a pastor reminded his flock: "I'm the boss here until they carry me out" which is what happened: dead priests were 'waked' in the rectory, and founding pastors were even buried on parish grounds! Nowadays, while there is a variety of ways each diocese implements Canon Law and Church policies on retirement, here's what most commonly happens, but first ...

Diocesan clerics only 'retire' from administrative duties of being pastor, chaplain, teacher, or being assigned to live or work in a particular place, etc. They remain a deacon, priest or bishop with the right to 'choose' to 'work' if they wish: to baptize, officiate at marriages, take a liturgical role at Mass, but are not obligated to do so. They're simply bound by the same 'rules' as the laity: to attend Mass on Sundays and holy days, abide by Church precepts and the Commandments, etc. If they become feeble or senile, the Bishop may suspend their right to preach and/or act in the name of the Church. In a way, it's like a married worker who retires from his or her job, but not the Sacrament of Matrimony. [Sorry!]

Since Canon Law sets retirement at 75, all clerics of that age must submit a letter of resignation - with one exception: the Pope; he's still 'carried out' of office! However, local law permits us to retire at 70. Unless the pastor and/or bishop objects, a deacon or priest [parochial vicar, not a

pastor] may be granted faculties to minister on a yearly basis; the bishop may also grant the same to a pastor. Only the Pope chooses when to end a bishop's term in office. For the rest of this article I will address only Diocesan Priests, not Deacons or Bishops - or Religious Order clerics who take a vow of poverty; since they never earn a salary their retirement arrangements are completely covered by their Order.

Retired priests have 3 options: 1] live in a rectory, though most dioceses forbid them to live where they had lived before - for obvious reasons; 2] rent a suite in the Diocesan retirement home for priests; 3] live in their own residence. How can a priest own his own place? Some diocesan priests inherit a home; some, like those ordained later in life, owned a home before seminary; some made great investments with their annual salary and sacrificed; some live with family or friends - or some or all of the above. Since he is no longer bound to live within his diocese or 'work' - he may live anywhere - and he has right to set his own schedule for sacramental duties, for which he receives the usual stipend. Or he may opt to sit on a beach and read, sipping cocktails until Jesus calls him home! Since most priests enjoy the ministry, but not administrative headaches - and since most need the additional income, most retired priests continue to serve the Lord and His Church - though they have every right to enjoy whatever time the Lord grants them to rest from their labors, but only after 70! [There is medical leave with full benefits, if he qualifies.]

From the start, the seminary encouraged us to have a troika of financial support for our retirement days: 1] personal savings; 2] Social Security and other government benefits [if there will be any left!] and 3] our pension - which is where you can help! Many dioceses, like our own, have added another annual collection; in December we have the Religious Retirement Collection to support retired Sisters and Brothers and Religious Order clergy like the Franciscans or Dominicans. In your envelope packets you will find a Second Collection, to be taken the weekend of February 28, for the Retired Diocesan Clergy [hopefully me ... in just 12 more years!] Please be as generous as your means allow - especially in this Year for Priests!

With God's love and my prayers,

Father Mike

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