

Rewarded A Hundredfold!

By Bishop Victor Galeone

As I prepare to celebrate the 50th anniversary of my priestly ordination, I would like to give an overview of what the priesthood means to me. I do so by quoting excerpts from my journals - like cameos from a spiritual odyssey.

12/17/60 - [Journal entry after the last conference of the retreat on the eve of my ordination.] After all these years, how good it was to see my folks again during the break the last hour! Realizing how distracted we were, Father shortened his talk somewhat, which served as the perfect finale of our retreat's motif. Briefly:

When parishioners learn that a new priest is being assigned to their parish, what is the main thing they want to see? An administrator? An eloquent preacher like Fulton Sheen? A good golfer? No! The main thing they want to see is the image of Jesus. "Will he be there for us when we need him? In the confessional, will he show us the compassion that Jesus showed the repentant sinner? Will he have time for us?" In a word, like the Gentiles who approached Philip, their greatest desire is, "We want to see Jesus!"

5/3/70 - This afternoon I stopped by the hospital to visit Dolores Schaefer, whose mother had asked me after the 10:30 Mass to keep her daughter in my prayers. Dolores, 33 years old and a mother of eight, is set to undergo surgery this Tuesday for colon cancer, involving a permanent colostomy. After conversing for a while, I asked, "Dolores, do you believe in miracles?" - "*Oh, yes, Father.*" - "That's good, because your mother is praying for one, and so am I." - "*Well, I'm not, Father. I'm just praying that I can accept God's Will, whatever it is...To offer it all up for my children.*"

12/22/73 - [I made the following journey entry while serving in the Peruvian Andes. On December 17th I drove the pickup to a distant parish, which had lost their pastor the year before. After ministering to the townsfolk for three days, I began my nine-hour return trip amidst the early onset of the rainy season. My two-wheel drive vehicle was no match for the dirt road, now converted into an artery of muck.]

Last night, after a whole day of futile effort trying to extract the pickup from the quagmire where it was embedded - shivering and miserable, and dejected - I prepared to spend the second night in that one-room stone hovel on the heights. As I attempted to fall asleep on the flea-infested animal skins, crowded together with the poor Indian family that had taken me in, with their baby crying on and off throughout the night, the stench of manure penetrating through the crevices of the stone wall - it occurred to me that if the rains did not let up, this was where I'd be spending Christmas. "Oh no, Lord," I pleaded, "please help me get out of this hole by tomorrow! What a rotten way to spend Christmas!"

And then the thought, almost like an internal voice, hit me: "*But, Victor, how do you think I spent the very first Christmas for you?*"

5/30/92 - [The following journal entry was made the day I buried John Rook, a 21 year old hemophiliac, who died of AIDS. Two years prior, I buried his oldest brother Donald, also a hemophiliac and father of four. His older brother Jim, a hemophiliac as well, gave this eulogy at John's funeral.]

"Seven children - six brothers and one sister. Three of the brothers were born with the condition of hemophilia, and in time - due to contaminated blood transfusions - developed full-blown AIDS. The oldest passed away two years ago. The second, we're laying to rest this morning. The third is speaking to you now.

“When Father Victor stopped by the house yesterday to ask if anyone wanted to give a tribute to John this morning, I said, ‘Yes, Father, I would.’ - John, I just want to say, Thank you! Thank you for showing me...how to die.” [I buried Jim two years later.]

4/23/94 - The funeral home was packed with Beppe’s relatives, friends and classmates for the wake service. A sophomore in college, Beppe passed away yesterday after five agonizing days in Shock Trauma. Last Saturday night his car was hit head-on by a drunk driver.

After Beppe’s classmates and friends had paid their tributes, his mother stood to speak. I shall never forget her testimony. She first thanked Beppe’s classmates for their kind words and then gave special thanks to the Shock Trauma team who had fought so valiantly to revive her son. She then concluded: “Finally, I want to thank God. Yes, I want to thank God for the twenty beautiful years that he gave Beppe to me. I can never repay him for so great a blessing.”

8/19/94 - [On my first visit to Peru since my departure, I made this journal entry as I was leaving the Andean town where I had spent five years. Back then, a project I had overseen was restoring the colonial church, built in 1636-92.]

Preparing to leave Andahuaylas today, I realize that all the effort expended in material tasks - even in restoring a church building - is not all that significant in the Lord’s eyes. No, the most important thing is to beautify the spiritual “building” of the Church - the body of Christ. All the rest will pass. Only the Church will last into eternity as the beautiful Bride of Christ.

11/16/96 - After anointing a patient at the nursing home yesterday, I was about to exit when I spotted him in the hallway. He was sitting next to this woman in a wheelchair - tenderly holding her hands. Not a word was being spoken. He just sat there with his gaze fixed on her. I walked over to introduce myself.

“Your wife, I take it?” - *“That’s right...of 47 years.”* - “Do you visit her often?” - *“Every single day. Haven’t missed a day in four years...except during that blizzard last year.”* - “She’s not saying anything.” - *“She can’t. Hasn’t been able to, ever since her stroke 18 months ago. She has Alzheimer’s too.”* - “Alzheimer’s!! Does she know who you are?” - *“Not really. But that doesn’t matter. I know who she is.”*

Lord, what an indictment against me - as I sit in your presence with one eye on the tabernacle and the other on my watch!

1/12/98 - Today, I received a note from Gerry and Theresa Chambers (former parishioners). They informed me that on December 4th their daughter Angela (34 years old, with Down’s syndrome) had died. On reading the note, I wept uncontrollably. Why was that?

What a good soul she was - brimming over with innocent joy. With her infectious smile she could melt your heart. I recall that gentle bear-hug she’d give me every Sunday after Mass while I was greeting the parishioners.

Angela, dear sister, now you know what kings and prophets have longed to know. And you can see with a clarity far exceeding that of the brightest minds on earth.

5/22/98 - Most of us have a skewed notion of what it means to be holy. Scripture insists, “Avoid *sin*,” meaning *all* sin. Whereas we feel it’s only necessary to avoid *most* sin. Imagine a soldier entering the battlefield with the notion, “I’ll try to avoid *most* of the shells.”

9/21/01 - Today marks one month since I was ordained bishop. What a grace-filled day that was in the presence of my family, many former parishioners, over 180 priests, 33 bishops, and two cardinals - yes, it was quite moving.

One of the more memorable events occurred towards the end of Mass as I was processing through the cathedral during the singing of the *Te Deum*. Arriving at the east transept where the priests were, I broke down as I witnessed their enthusiastic cheering and clapping. I thought, "What am I doing here, Lord? Me, the bishop? I should be there with them."

2/7/10 - [Administering Confirmation was one of my favorite duties as bishop. This excerpt from a candidate's letter helps to explain why.]

"Bishop, being one of the oldest in the family, I always wanted an older brother, so I adopted Jesus as my older brother. He helps me when I am in trouble, he's there when I need to talk to him, and he loves me very much. When I talk to Jesus, he gives me the boost of energy that I need to get the things done I don't want to do...Some day, I desire to go on mission trips to help the less fortunate, and to volunteer at the Woman's Help Center."

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Peter spoke up to say: "Behold, we have left everything to follow you. What then will be our reward?"

Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, everyone who has left homes or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much in this life and inherit life eternal."