

It is wonderful to have you come here and join me for this celebration.

Many people talk about how things in their life were unexpected. After a marriage people often say it is not what they expected, or after getting a big job. But, I would have to say, for me, priesthood has been largely what I did expect.

I expected many difficulties, and I have had them. I expected late night calls to anoint the dying, I expected uncomfortable seats in the confessional, I expected difficult parishioners, I expected that many things that I would start would fail, and in all these things and more: the priesthood has lived up to my expectations!

But I knew that life has difficulties, that the priesthood would have difficulties, and it has been as expected.

But there are two things that I didn't really expect: first, that God's generosity would exceed anything I had planned on from Him, and second, that I would change how I feel about the Mass.

I knew that God promised and promises that "my grace is sufficient for you." I knew that God directs all things and that no difficulty would come to me except those difficulties that the Lord would prepare me for and strengthen me to bear. I knew that wherever the Cross comes the opportunity of the Resurrection comes with it. And I knew that the Lord loves a cheerful giver, and rewards him.

But my experience of these realities has far exceeded the mere statement of these doctrines.

There were many things I feared, in my own weaknesses, that I have been given the unexpected strength to not only cope with but live as if those fears had never existed in the first place. And for every difficulty that has come there have been joys and satisfactions that made it all seem right.

So, while I knew this as a baseline doctrine, and kind of expected it, my experience of God's generosity has been that it has greatly exceeded what He promised.

But there was second thing I said I didn't expect in my priesthood, and that was how I have changed how I feel about the Mass.

Thursday will be ten years since I was ordained. And I have come to realize that the Mass is much more important than I ever thought.

I always knew that the Mass has infinite value, infinite merits as Christ's Sacrifice of Calvary made present continually on our altars and offered for us to the Father.

But I have experienced, more and more, that the Mass is what the priest is about. In one sense, the Mass is what the priesthood is all about because only the priest can offer the Mass. But in another sense, the Mass is what the priesthood is all about because the priest as a priest is not about what he is doing but about Christ. Whose body do I feed the people with? Not mine but Christ's. Whose words do I say in the prayer

of consecration? Not mine but Christ's. And as I stand at the altar as the intercessor between people and God, in whose person do I stand and whose prayer do I offer? Not mine but Christ's.

And, in as much as I am a true priest, this holds for all that I do. When I teach, when I preach, when I visit the sick, when I bless a home. If I am doing these things in reality then it is not me who does them but Christ, using me as His instrument.

It is true that I am at work also, that His presence comes to life in a certain sense in my flesh and in my humanity and my personality, and even in my personal quirks His incarnation becomes manifest in those. But in as much as I am a priest as a priest, I must be Christ. And in as much as any Christian is a Christian as a Christian, we must be Christ.

And it is the Mass that shows this most clearly, and by His gifts of grace, makes it possible most directly.

So, on this anniversary, I am grateful to you for coming, grateful to God for the priesthood, and grateful that His gifts have even exceeded even what He had promised.