

Priests' Day Homily  
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You know that where I come from along the shore of Lake Erie, the winter season and snow in particular are important facts of life. It just is. An average winter brings at least 9 or 10 feet of that white stuff.

For some people, even in Erie, snow is a disgusting four-letter word. For some people it represents one of the worst burdens that nature can force us to bare; like just when you finish clearing your driveway of the 8 inches of partly cloudy that fell overnight, the snow plow rumbles down your street and deposits 2 feet of a heavy, frozen mess. The pastor of the parish where I lived for 20 years absolutely hates snow.

For others, snow is a welcome delight. It can really look beautiful in the moonlight or on a bright, sunny winter day. Instead of groaning about snow as a frozen obstacle in the driveway, some people see snow as an opportunity for recreation when they grab the skis or a sled and head for one of the hills; or an opportunity to do a good deed for an elderly neighbor who doesn't have the strength to shovel her sidewalk.

Someone who has a sympathetic view, once observed that individual snowflakes are one of nature's most fragile things, but just look at what they can do when they stick together.

This time of prayer and our social gathering today is an opportunity to reflect on

- who we are individually as priests; in one sense we are fragile creatures, and
- who we are as a presbyterate; and what we can do when we stick together.

St. Paul reminds us today that it is important, or necessary, or essential to who we are and what are to be that we "Make every effort to preserve the unity which has the Spirit as its origin and peace as its binding force."

For St. Paul, being fragile is not a matter of weakness in the sense of an imperfection that negates our intrinsic, God-given goodness.

Being fragile is part of our being creatures who are dependent upon the one who created us.

St. Paul admits being fragile when he describes himself as a prisoner of the Lord.

But St. Paul is not a naysayer like the guy who stands in his driveway and curses the snowplow driver as he makes his rounds on the streets of the neighborhood.

St. Paul is conscious of his own unworthiness and he reminds us of our own unworthiness (as if we need to be reminded of that!).

More important, St. Paul also suggests something about who we are as a presbyterate; this point is made when he reminds us that we are to live our life in a manner that is worthy of our calling; and our calling, each one of us here is the calling to be priests of Jesus Christ.

What an awesome and wonderful thing that is. We are so blessed today to have this time to reflect on and celebrate that mystery on this priest day.

I am a great fan of St. Paul and the way in which he communicates the core values that are at stake and how we are to go about capitalizing on the rich treasure that those core values mean for us.

St. Paul tells us that if we are to live a life that is worthy of our calling (our calling as priests), we are to live in relation with one another, with the Church, and people in this world that Christ has called us to serve in a way that is motivated and expressed through

- perfect humility,
- meekness,
- and patience,
- and by bearing with one another lovingly

At the core or center of this way of living a life worthy of our calling, St. Paul tells us that

- there is one Lord,
- there is one faith,
- there is one baptism,

- and there is one God and Father of all, who is over all, and works through all, and is in all.

That's the core of who we are as Christians and as priests.

And for us as Christians and priests, it is not enough for it to be anyone of us to stand alone alone, even if we recognize the presence of the one Lord and God at the core of our life.

For us as Christians and as priests, it is absolutely necessary for us to live a life worthy of our calling by recognizing and preserving the unity that has the Holy Spirit as its origin; its core.

For us as individual priests, it can be all too easy at times to recognize how fragile we are like a single snowflake.

But, for us as priests, for us as members of this presbyterate, it is good for us to be reminded of what we can do like a whole bunch of snowflakes when they stick together.

In a classic Peanuts cartoon Lucy demanded that Linus change TV channels, threatening him with her fist if he didn't. "What makes you think you can walk right in here and take over?" asks Linus.

"These five fingers," says Lucy. "Individually they're nothing but when I curl them together like this into a single unit, they form a weapon that is terrible to behold."

Linus hands over the remote control. Turning away, he looks at his fingers and says, "Why can't you guys get organized like that?"

I am not suggesting Lucy's aggressive approach as a model for our life and ministry. But, I think that Linus asks the right question about how we should be organized.

In the official handbook on how to be a bishop (*The Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops*), it lists several principles which should guide a bishop in organizing his ministry. I want to highlight just three that apply especially in my relationship with you my brother priests:

1. The principle of communion – “The bishop should promote unity in faith, in love, and in discipline, so that the diocese is aware that it forms a vital part of the whole people of God. The unity which the bishop seeks to promote is not proposed as sterile uniformity, but it encompasses legitimate diversity, which he is called to safeguard and encourage. Ecclesial communion will lead the bishop to work constantly for the common good of the diocese” and this is to be done “in view of the good of the universal Church.”
2. The principle of cooperation – Which requires the bishop “to involve individually and collectively all persons in the diocese with each one cooperating in the one mission of the Church according to his/her own particular vocation and gifts received from the Holy Spirit.”
3. The principle of respecting the competence of others – “The bishop has the duty not only to stimulate, encourage and increase the good work taking place in the diocese, but also the duty to coordinate in order to avoid wasted efforts, unnecessary duplication of work, and harmful tensions.”

That same official handbook on how to be a bishop underscores the primary importance of the relationship with the bishop and the priests of the diocese, as individuals and as a presbyterate. It says:

The priests of the diocese “are in fact, the principal and irreplaceable co-workers of the bishop” who should be acquainted with them and their human, spiritual, and pastoral needs and encourage them in the building up the common life that the priests are to share.

I want you to know that those are not just words to me. I can only begin in this small way on this Priest Day to remind you how precious you are in the sight of God and how important you are to me.

I am convinced of the word of God spoken to us in the letter of St. Paul to the Ephesians. All of us, myself included, need to take that word to heart:

- that in spite of how unworthy we may see ourselves in the sight of God or others, it is necessary to our vocation to live a life that is worthy of our calling; our calling to be priests

- that in living that worthy life in spite of our unworthiness, it is necessary to our vocation that we make every effort to preserve the unity which has the Spirit as its origin and peace as its binding force.

Someone once observed that individual snowflakes are one of nature's most fragile things, but just look at what they can do when they stick together.

On this hot, humid, summer day, it may not be a good time to be a snowflake, but this is an awesome time to be a priest and to be part of this presbyterate of the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown.