

June 9, 1947

Dear Parishioners:

On June 17th I celebrate my SILVER JUBILEE in the Holy Priesthood, with a Solemn High Mass by St. Paul's three priests at 9 o'clock, our Most Reverend Bishop graciously consenting to be present. Naturally, the reflections during these twenty-five years have been intensified as the day draws nigh. After a determined but not outstanding six years in St. Patrick's Seminary, Menlo Park, California, (I had been many years away from school) I realized that I was not as well prepared as others physically, mentally, spiritually for this grave responsibility. Yet some, who seemingly had ideal qualifications, were not even to offer one Mass or, if ordained, to live a portion of the many years I have already been granted in the ministry--and this in a world whereof Our Lord spoke: "The harvest is white but the laborers are few". WHY-- is a mystery that God alone can solve. Therefore, I am not puffed up on this attainment of TIME. St. Paul gives the reason: "If you HAVE received why glory as if you HAD NOT received?"

So, while I would rather let this anniversary pass quietly and with little mention of its significance to me, I feel it is a duty to emphasize the place Catholic priests, "other Christs", have in the plan of Our Savior, who ordained Apostles and sent them, with their successors, to preach, instruct, baptize, administer the other Sacraments and, above all, commemorate the Last Supper and the Crucifixion in the Sacrifice of the Mass, which history shows, in times good and evil, to be the bulwark of the Christian Faith, showering Christ's blessings upon the living and the dead. Complained the baffled enemy: "It is the Mass that matters". Without priests the Church cannot follow the divine mandate to spread the Gospel throughout the world.

Now in observing this 25th anniversary, I desire no MATERIAL gifts--my needs are simple. But when it comes to things SPIRITUAL, then it is different. We all know--and should not forget for one moment--that we can never get too much of the GRACE OF GOD. It is a PRICELESS BLESSING IN THIS LIFE AND IN ETERNITY! It makes saints what they are; the lack of it makes sinners what they are; it is the fullness of life right here on earth, creating happiness in adversity; overcomes all evil; accomplishes all good. The absence of it in the world today is seen in the sad attempts at establishing PEACE. How can evil men--hating God and religion--ever allow true peace to come to themselves or others?

And as I have been preserved innumerable times from disaster that could have wrecked body and soul, I feel, as they say, the "breaks" have come my way. I cannot expect this to continue unto the end but as prayer lessens the effect of trials with which we are or may be afflicted, all I ask is that you remember me on this occasion in this way. Do not wait to write down what you will do but DO IT NOW--a little prayer in my behalf. The Blessed Trinity--God, the Father, who created us; God, the Son, who redeemed us; God, the Holy Ghost, who sanctifies us--always grants our petitions when they are for our true welfare and that of others. For this great favor I, in turn, will remember you at the altar, that YOU may have every needed grace.

It is unique that I started late--at 42 years of age--left, and now finish these 25 years in the same parish: The first year as the First Assistant in the growing parish of St. Paul (founded eight years before by Father Robert J. Armstrong, now Bishop of Sacramento, California), the last thirteen as the third Pastor; the other eleven years as Pastor of the adjoining Holy Trinity Parish, Goldendale and Missions, 150 miles along the majestic Columbia River; both parishes, as it were, in the shadow of that most lovely and wondrous mountain in the Great West, truly American, so far almost forgotten, MT. ADAMS, with beautiful Mt. St. Helens keeping guard in the northwest corner of Holy Trinity Parish and world famed Mt. Rainier just over the western border of St. Paul's Parish. In this vast territory, formerly the abode of spouting volcanos, gigantic earthquakes, towering glaciers, rushing waters, either parish being larger than some Eastern U.S. dioceses, live loyal and progressive children of our Holy Mother the Church, few in number per square mile but strong in faith. The closing pioneer period in which I arrived has given way to a new era, by the opening of those great means of communication, the super highways, and increased acreage under irrigation; and with the development of aerial transportation the cause of religion will be greatly enhanced.

I am truly thankful for the years given me in serving at the altar, though at times as Pastor they seemed almost unbearable. But never once have I regretted becoming a priest. Often I said to myself, and sometimes to others, smiling, "If you can hang by the neck for five minutes, you can hang all day". The element of perseverance shown, of course, is due to the Providence of God in which is included His generosity in providing kindly and cooperative Catholics (also non-Catholics) in both parishes to help overcome difficulties and achieve success. I have been greatly blessed in all this and should be satisfied, yet I cannot but feel that the years ahead will be for me, personally, the hardest. So, again, I ask your earnest prayers. As my maternal grandmother, Mary Burke Regan, (of blessed memory to all who still remain) would say: God bless you!

Sincerely yours in Our Lord, *Father T. J. Edwards*

P.S.--In St. Paul's School observance of the Silver Jubilee on Tuesday, May 27, over 500 children received Holy Communion at this First Solemn High Mass by three priests of the Parish: myself as Celebrant; Father T. J. Pitsch, Deacon; Father T. P. Sullivan, Sub-Deacon, I was overwhelmed by a Spiritual Boquet with the amazing total of 143,686 items and a chain of 25 Masses to end on THE day, June 17th, presented in a lovely basket of silver. All this and the sentiment expressed in program of address, poem, song will always be treasured in memory. It is an example of the effect of a truly Christian education. My profound thanks to the Sisters and the children. I promise a special continued remembrance of them in Mass and in prayers. Father TAE



Re "BREAKS": That statement in letter may not be thought exaggerated (and you will pray more), I list some of the more important in the PHYSICAL order. The SPIRITUAL and MORAL dangers would fill a volume, from childhood -- sometimes open, other times hidden and insidious, again not really at first bad, but could have become such through association. Daily press filled with such incidents that became tragic. None at St. Paul's whatsoever during the fourteen years I have been here.

1. One year old - "Cholera Infantum". 1st and 3rd brothers died of it. Doctor gave me up; Mother would not. She went to my godfather, Brother McNeive, S.J., St. Gall's Church, Milwaukee, Wis., for help. He gave her some St. Ignatius water. Doctor came at night - "The baby is better--what have you done?" When told, he, a non-Catholic, slowly nodded his head: "I have heard of such things". Never seriously ill since; but this does not mean that I am forever exempt, so I am not bragging.
2. Creeping backwards out of 1st story window of "flat" above our store, saying "I go down see Mama". Maternal grandmother heard. Hired girl wanted to rush in and seize me, but told to crawl around sides of room, as I would let go if she came from the front. The fall would have been 20 feet. High ceilings in those days.
3. Decoration Day in Wis., 9 yrs. old. With 2 younger lads, found powder horn of one boy's grandfather, filled with black powder. Exploded small portions, then grand finale! No dry bottle but found tomato can. Emptied the powder into it, lit a match. Explosion knocked the two boys backwards off high board fence. Ran home, said nothing. Man cutting wood behind the fence smelled burning hair, found me groping around with the wool bicycle cap on my head afire, face seared. Fortunately, I had my eyes TIGHTLY CLOSED. No burns below my face. Months later I found the side wall of the can beyond two 2-story houses, blackened, curled piece of tin.
4. Three years later. Learned to swim in slough near Lake Michigan, Chicago. Rashly tried to swim across. Found had attempted too much. Gulped in a lot of dirty, stagnant water but finally got feet on bottom. No one helped me or apparently paid any attention. Very little supervision of children then. Freedom galore.
5. Same summer. Learned to dive in shallow water so thought would try deep water in "cold box", a tug boat landing connected with Lake Michigan. Dived straight down from a timber a foot above the water. Forgot to learn how to come up so went down, down, and as heavy for my age, sank like a stone. Had eyes open, light gradually disappeared, until black as ink. Struggled all the time, finally managed to get one foot on the bottom, gave a hard push, striking coils of loose wire without becoming tangled in it, started up but could hardly hold my breath. Understand depth about 18 feet.
6. Fall same year. Alone at Chicago's First World's Fair. Came home on "Christopher Columbus", "whaleback", it was called, cigar shaped steel vessel. Dark night, no bright lights on ship, strong wind. Climbed to upper decks. Boat gave a lurch, and but for strong grip on railing would have been pitched overboard, as both feet left the deck. This type of boat never very popular--too easy to turn turtle.
7. Skating on lake in Wis. where ice cut for big city packing plants. Did not notice chopped ice on surface as skated towards chute where cakes were hoisted to ice house. So down I went over my head in the icy water. Managed to grab framework of chute, pulled self out, took off skates and ran 3 miles in sub-zero weather, arriving home, where mother had a women's card party, a sheet of ice. No ill results.
8. Getting away from "madding throng" in Chicago one Sunday afternoon, walked out on rough ice of Lake Michigan from North Shore district. Nobody around, no city sounds, so liked it, and kept on to the 3 mile crib, intake for city water. Noticed cracks in ice with water showing and reports that should have indicated danger. On return, cracks widened and I realized that the ice was breaking loose from the shore. Got off in time. Afloat on that ice would have been fatal unless help came, as when entered open lake would be broken to bits by the waves. A group some miles north of me were marooned and fortunately were reached by boat. The next morning all the ice in the harbor was gone and all along lake shore for many miles, due to west wind.
10. Out West. Railroad freight wreck. All cars and caboose left rails and leaned against the right bank of cut. 100 ft. either side would have been over the bank. Main line engineer was going 60 mi. per hr. Was up in cupola of caboose, on right side, so safe; railroad man on the left was thrown (height 7 ft.) back to the rear door on the floor. Unconscious. Never really recovered. Goldendale-Lyle branch line.
11. While building side porch Goldendale church, fell 10 ft. backwards, scaffolding collapsing. But everything cleared out of way, landed on feet but sat down hard. Paralyzed for half hour, then walked. X-ray showed no injury to spine. If ladder, planks, 2 horses, had not cleared, it would have been a different story: broken bones.
- 12 plus. Drove Model T more than 50,000 miles over every primitive road from Canada to Mexico. Radius rod ("wish bone") broken twice, not known until once on level ground trying to crank car, no control. Another a simple left turn, swung completely around. Sheared cotter pin in right hind wheel twice, also losing complete control of car. But these 4 experiences all without any mishap. Fell asleep once on grade but woke up on edge. Had 5 gals. gas in back seat. Several times magneto lights failed; drove in dark as much as 25 mi. Once crossed a bridge on a curve, with no guard railing, 15 foot drop, and didn't know of it until asked "how did you make it?" Many times stopped at night to see where at, and found on edge of a jump off. . . . 10 years ago this time, encountered attempted holdup man. Said had a gun in pocket but I jumped at him and it was a screwdriver, which I got on the head and also over each eye. But he got it from me with the point when I took it away from him. And he did NOT get the money. But perhaps I was foolish in taking the chance with a dope fiend. Perhaps he still retained some Christian principles. . . . In the last 10 years only one other hazardous experience. When our 1937 Ford was new, I was not used to so much speed and went too fast up a narrow steep grade in low gear. Would have turned over and rolled down the mountain if when car stopped the hind wheels were not buried 6 inches in the soft dirt beside the road as the car was overbalanced. Some kindly gold miners hitched cable to it and dragged it back on the road.



I thought a brief essay advisable at this time concerning a rumor abroad since I first came to Yakima, spreading to the Columbia River country, that I was married before I became a priest--that I went back East to visit my children. At this time of my life it certainly would be a consolation if this were so, for there is no closer bond in this world than that between parents and children. What wondrous blessings flow from it throughout life, and more so when parents are no longer able to bear their burdens unaided in what is called "old age". This rumor no doubt was based on circumstantial evidence: Middle aged, graying temples, thinning hair--what has he been doing all this time? Said one: "We thought a young priest was coming to St. Paul's." Replied I: "How could I be any younger; I am only two months old."

In the matter of priestly vocation, many think along lines of the mass production age in which we live, and so automatically boys in good health, fair talents at least, studious, obedient, deeply interested in religion, glad to serve Mass, satisfactory family background, are put on the production line at the seminary at about twelve years of age, and in another twelve are ready to begin the active life in the sacred ministry with assurance of success.

But it is not as simple as all that. While many enter the seminary, not all finish. Some find out they have no real vocation; others are advised that they have none; still others in their late 'teens have changed their ideals--the glamorous world, opportunities for success, enjoyment of legitimate pleasures beckon them. Some others regretfully drop out on account of poor health. The reasons for not becoming priests are as varied as types of human nature. In the priesthood there are no two alike. The question of a vocation is serious for individuals, the Church, mankind. God's help is as necessary as it was when Our Lord first built His Church upon the Apostles. He still, of course, selects candidates, but through the Church. Without a "call" from a Bishop no one can be ordained, however sure he may be of his vocation. Judgment of ourselves is not always true and unbiased, as it must be in so important a matter as this: God's will, the welfare of souls.

Coming to myself, I admit no signs of a vocation as a boy or young man. While faithful to my religious duties, serving Mass ONLY ONCE was enough. I got along in school, but not studious. Family background good, but no record of priests or sisters on the Catholic side; on father's side, non-Catholic, considerable activity in religion. The two grandfathers did not take too much interest in church. Maternal grandfather used to say to his wife: "Mary, you pray too much; God is tired of listening to you." Paternal grandmother's side very religious. I think I get much from that source too. As to the opposite sex: Anyone who KNEW me--I confess that not even my mother knew me very well--would have said: "There is a lad who will have a home of his own before he can vote, like his father." I offer no reason but my greatest interests were dogs, girls, amateur track athletics. Mother said that from a toddling child they had to watch me for I would seize every dog around the neck. To this day I speak to all dogs I see and try to pet them. I have really never been bitten, but nipped a few times, as warning I guess, not to get too fresh. They vary like their masters.

As to girls, I played with them from earliest years; to some extent, no doubt, because my brother, 4 years older, was 10 years older in disposition. I always "placed them on a pedestal"; rather bashful; never a quarrel that I can remember. When I was 8 years old a classmate, little prim sweet faced Trixie Tyler, daughter of a Doctor, whom I admired from a distance, died of diphtheria. That night I lay awake and grieved. It was winter, trees bare, with a robin which returned too early frozen in one of them. All this depressed me and never forgotten. So girls of all races, little tots, adolescents, young ladies, single or married women, I have always placed first above their lord and master, man. The mystic eternal feminine! But I was DEEPLY interested in only one girl at a time--ultimate intention was always marriage. That popular song: "There's only one girl in this world for me, only one girl keeps my company; she's not so very pretty, etc.", intrigued me. As it was a 50-50 proposition I admitted of no rivalry, but never said anything of course. If others took over, I departed. So naturally I never went with "many" girls. This would safeguard a later vocation, conjugal (L. con, with; jugum, yoke--join together in marriage) affection the basis. No familiarity, therefore nothing to regret. Looking back, I see the influence of these good girls providential for certain periods of my life, though they never knew it. Despite ideals, men may wander from the narrow path. For me that would have been disastrous. When we moved from Wisconsin to Chicago, walking distance from business district, rooming and boarding house section, very little contact with girls; even less as soon joined gymnasium, and at least three nights a week absorbed in my third great interest, track athletics. Wanted to be champion of the world. This incident may partly explain: Brother and I walking to office. Said he: "Tom, why don't you shine your shoes?" I laughed. He added: "I wouldn't care but everyone knows you're my brother." The athlete was careless, evidently a fatal attitude BEFORE marriage.

While yet 17 yrs. old I learned stenography at home (couldn't afford \$10 a mo. at business college). Worked too hard, city clamor made me nervous, so came West in 25th year. Indoor work too trying so went to Table Mountain country above Ellensburg, Wash. Spent one and one-half years there ranching and placer gold mining, which built up my health. Met schoolteacher there on vacation. We corresponded after she left. I went to Idaho in fall 1907 to take homestead on Twin Falls project but deal did not go through so located in Boise, Idaho for two years. In meantime kept up correspondence, trying to answer her questions about religion. Her folks very opposed; finally we had to cease writing (I never compromised in religion) but in one of her last letters, referring to one from me, she said: "Would you be a priest?" It had never entered my mind. Religion became my absorbing interest and I just had to leave a good job in the fall of 1909.

I went to Gonzaga to learn Latin at 29 years of age, take a chance, and trust in the future wherever it would lead, and was warmly received by the good Jesuits. And, here I am finally. It's all a very long story, but from this bare framework of the past it can be glimpsed that I was frustrated in ALL my WORLDLY ambitions AND YET, though unworthy, received a most priceless gift, a call, like the Apostles: "Come, follow me."