

FORTY YEARS AND COUNTING

This coming week, my priest classmates and I will have a private and simple gathering to celebrate our 40th anniversary of ordination. Out of the 31 ordained in 1977 – one of the last large post-Vatican II classes (numbers went downhill starting in 1980) – 17 of us are still priests. Of the other 14, to quote the great Beatles song, “some are dead and some are living.” On the very rare occasions when we get together as a class, we invite our resigned and married classmates along with their wives to join us, as will be the case this week.

Some of my priest classmates will be having parties or gatherings in their parishes. But since I do everything I can to avoid being a center of attention whenever possible, I’ve opted to not do that. Instead, I’m rolling the dice and hoping I’ll make it to the 50th which would be a few weeks before I turn 76, thus killing two birds with one stone by celebrating a belated 75th birthday along with 50 years of priesthood. Fingers crossed and God willing!

I’m only telling you this for several reasons. First, please pray for my classmates and for all those celebrating ordination anniversaries this month (almost all priesthood ordinations in Chicago have taken place in May for the past 80 years at least). Second, please pray for an increase in vocations to the priesthood and religious life. But perhaps most importantly, pray that young men and women with a Vatican II spirit hear the call to ordination or religious life. Sadly, for the last twenty years or so, far too many young people have been choosing this path in life in what seems to me to be an attempt to escape from the world or a desire to return the Church to the isolated, detached, out-of-touch institution it was before Vatican II. Thank God that Pope Francis has begun to point us in a new and positive direction, but it will take time to turn the ship around and we can only hope that he lives long enough to do that.

The final reason I’m mentioning this is simply to thank you for helping to make my last pastoral assignment so rewarding and inspiring. Your kindness and generosity continue to amaze me. Instead of holding my breath and racing toward retirement, you’ve made it possible for me to look forward to these last four years of active ministry in the Archdiocese of Chicago and here at St. Joseph.

Fr. Bob