

Bishop Madden celebrates 50 years as a priest

A packed Baltimore Basilica gave an extended standing ovation to Bishop Denis J. Madden, retired auxiliary bishop of Baltimore, during a Mass June 25 to mark his 50th anniversary as a priest.

Archbishop William E. Lori gave Bishop Madden a hug, after honoring him in remarks at the end of the Mass.

The archbishop called Bishop Madden “the whole package,” noting that his simplicity of dedication was inspiring.

Referring to the bishop’s nine years spent in the Holy Land with the Catholic Near East Welfare Association, the archbishop said Bishop Madden “is a lover of the holy places where Christ accomplished our salvation.”

Archbishop Lori also praised his work as an ecumenical leader, and said he was a “lover of God’s people,” especially the poor and unknown.

“He is a priest and a bishop who lives the joy of the Gospel and manifests the mercy of Jesus,” the archbishop said.

In his homily, Bishop Madden quoted from George Bernano’s book, “Diary of a Country Priest,” relating the final words the author put on the lips of his simple priest: “Grace is everywhere.”

The bishop said, “These words have special meaning today as I look out at all of you. For some 50 years and longer, by the grace of God, I’ve come to know and experience the truth of those words, and each of you must know that more often than not, you have been the bearers who allowed me to experience God’s grace and love.”

He said that when he was a young student in the Bronx, N.Y., one of the Dominican sisters who taught at St. Anselm School encouraged them to finish their work by

saying, "I don't care if the pope himself walks through that door, you're not leaving until you complete what I told you to do."

Bishop Madden added wryly, "I would think to myself, 'I bet if the pope walks through that door, she'll let us out early.'"

He noted that because of his work with CNEWA and as a bishop, he has met St. John Paul II, Pope Benedict and Pope Francis, calling it beyond his wildest imagination, "something never merited or foreseen."

The bishop said he was trying to convey how God does so many things for us that we never could have imagined or dared to ask for - and not just highlights such as meeting the pope.

"It's that realization time and again that despite our limitations, sins, weaknesses, failures, unkept promises, God loves us beyond measure," he said.

The bishop said that he, like many priests, find that they set out in their ministry to do some good and find that they have received and been blessed by the interaction with people.

Recalling his work in the Holy Land, he said working in refugee camps in the West Bank and Gaza made this clear for him. "And so it was that when going to those blessed shrines in Jerusalem, especially the Holy Sepulcher; the birthplace of Christ in Bethlehem; the Galilee with the Mount of Beatitudes, the place of the multiplication of loaves at Tabgha, Nazareth; and all the rest of those holy stations; there is that sense that you are standing on holy ground.

The same is true, he said - whether in refugee camps in Israel or on prayer walks in Baltimore areas that have experienced great violence - that "grace is everywhere."

Bishop Madden said that time and again in his 50 years of priestly ministry, he has seen the stream of God's goodness.

"God's love, God's grace, is everywhere and for this I thank God," he said. "And I thank you all here this afternoon, for more often than you could ever imagine, you have been and are the expressions of that grace in my life."

The anniversary Mass was concelebrated by current and former auxiliary bishops of Baltimore and dozens of priests.

A reception at the George Peabody Library in Mount Vernon followed the Mass.

Also see:

In his own words: A conversation with Bishop Denis J. Madden

Bishop Madden: Retired now ... sort of

*For more photos, visit the Catholic Review's Smugmug page **here**.*

Email Christopher Gunty at cgunty@CatholicReview.org.