

Memories of parish life remain strong

Each year on the first Sunday of Advent, Father Jim would celebrate Mass for several families in our neighborhood at one of our homes. The Mass included the blessing of our Advent wreaths and was followed by dinner. Between Mass and dinner, he would regale us with the biography of an obscure saint – we were fairly sure most of these saints were fictional, since we had never heard of, for example, the patron saint of rectory cooks, who had been martyred for serving meatloaf once too often.

Those were great feasts, both the feast around the Eucharistic table, and the feast we shared afterward. It was more than appropriate that we gathered at the table of the Lord to be nourished by his real presence before we nourished each other with a potluck meal and fellowship.

He was just one of the men who served at Our Lady of Loretto Parish in Hometown, Ill. (yes, there is a place called Hometown). I can recall most of the priests, nuns and deacons who served there when I was growing up; their lasting impact on our family speaks to the profound witness of their vocation. It is comforting to note that many of the fond family memories I have are connected to our parish.

I was fortunate to have nine siblings, so when we put on our own Nativity pageant, we had almost enough cast members to play the innkeeper, the shepherds and angels, along with Mary and Joseph. Often we had an infant to play the baby Jesus. Sometimes after performing the show for Mom and Dad, we took the play “on the road” to the Dominican sisters’ convent for the nuns and to the rectory for the priests. Gosh, we were adorable (I wonder what happened?).

That was back when a dozen or more nuns at a parish school was not uncommon, and four or five priests staffing one small suburban Chicago parish was the norm. You won’t find that in any diocese in this country anymore.

As we approach the final days of Advent, some of our priests prepare to celebrate

three, four or more liturgies on Christmas. They will bring the message of Christ's incarnation to us again, as they do each year, and we will listen to the words of the Gospel again, and it will make our hearts new.

Our priests and consecrated religious touch our lives at times of celebration such as the holidays and sometimes when we need great comfort. Let us hope that the God who brings us Good News and tidings of great joy will bring to them peace and good will as well.

Let's hope that our clergy and religious will continue to share – as my family did a long time ago – a feast of the presence of God in the presence of good friends.

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