

# Monsignor Adam Parker, Cardinal O'Brien's priest-secretary, learns from his mentor

**By George P. Matysek Jr.**

*gmatysek@CatholicReview.org*

*Twitter: @ReviewMatysek*

Few people know Cardinal Edwin F. O'Brien as well as Monsignor Adam J. Parker.

The former pastor of Church of the Ascension in Halethorpe has served as the cardinal's priest-secretary from the moment Cardinal O'Brien arrived in Baltimore more than four years ago – driving the cardinal, maintaining his schedule, providing background information, managing events and offering daily support.

It was a role Monsignor Parker never anticipated, yet one that has enriched his priesthood as he's witnessed what he regards as a model of priestly devotion from a leader he calls a "tremendous mentor."



*Monsignor Adam Parker is shown with then-Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien at St. Ann in Hagerstown in 2009. (CR File)*

"He's a very deeply spiritual man," Monsignor Parker said of Cardinal O'Brien. "He has a very profound relationship with Jesus Christ and he's very much devoted to the celebration of the Eucharist and eucharistic adoration.

When I go to the chapel in the morning, he's already there praying and when I leave the chapel at the end of the day, he's still there."

Because Cardinal O'Brien was unfamiliar with the priests of the archdiocese, he asked his predecessor, Cardinal William H. Keeler, to select a priest-secretary for him.

“Cardinal Keeler asked me to come to dinner and he said, ‘the new archbishop has asked me to select someone and you’re it,’ ” Monsignor Parker remembered, noting with a laugh that there was no question mark at the end of Cardinal Keeler’s announcement. “I was absolutely stunned.”

Monsignor Parker had briefly encountered Cardinal O’Brien when Monsignor Parker was a seminarian on his way to study at the Pontifical North American College in Rome, which Cardinal O’Brien had led prior to Monsignor Parker’s enrollment there. A few years later, the cardinal recognized Monsignor Parker as a seminarian on a flight to Rome and offered him a ride to the seminary.

“All these years later, I’ve had the opportunity to return the favor,” Monsignor Parker said.

Cardinal O’Brien introduced Monsignor Parker to Pope Benedict XVI when the pope presented the cardinal with his pallium in 2008. He would again have a chance to greet the pope that same year when Pope Benedict visited Washington and New York.

Monsignor Parker said it has been a privilege to play a role in helping Cardinal O’Brien build relationships with the priests of the archdiocese. He called the cardinal more than a mentor. He’s also a friend.

Some of the best advice Cardinal O’Brien has given Monsignor Parker, he said, was to keep his spiritual life strong and to deepen his knowledge of the faith. Monsignor Parker will take the cardinal’s advice and pursue additional theological studies in Rome in the coming years.

The Baltimore clergyman will continue his role as priest-secretary to Cardinal O’Brien as the cardinal begins his new duties as grand master of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulcher of Jerusalem.

“The work should prove to be very interesting,” Monsignor Parker said, “and Pope Benedict is literally one of our neighbors.”