

# The Diocese of Great Falls

P.O. Box 1399  
Great Falls, Montana  
59403

August 21, 1978  
Ordination and Installation

On July 31st, I wrote a letter to the priests and people of the Diocese of Great Falls in which I said, "My ordination and installation as the fifth bishop of Great Falls affects not only my life but each of you as priests, deacons, and laity of Eastern Montana. It is precisely because of you as the People of God that this approaching awesome event in my own life is given significance and understanding. A Bishop does not live in isolation, but rather in the context of a relationship to a people, a People of God who share a joy and hope in the Lord. It is because of that relationship that I eagerly await my coming among you and making Montana my home." IT IS GOOD TO BE HOME.

When the appointment was announced of my selection as the Bishop of Great Falls by our beloved Holy Father Pope Paul VI, family and relatives began to ask "Why are you leaving?" and a host of other questions. I am extremely happy that so many of my family, relatives and friends have joined us here this evening because they have met and experienced the land and people of Montana - and once you have that experience, there is no need to answer the question of why I am here. I am here because of a great people, a great presbyterate and a great land. John Steinbeck's words ring true. He said, "For other states I have admiration, respect, recognition, but with Montana, it's love and it's difficult to analyze love when you're in it."

That Montana is my home today is due to many others beyond myself. First and foremost, I give thanks and praise to God the Father, Son and Spirit who have shared the gift of life with me which enables me and empowers me to a life shared by all the baptized in Christ Jesus, and whose love has watched over me and cared for me in ways and means which constantly surprises me and challenges me.

To our recently departed Holy Father, Pope Paul VI, I am most grateful for the appointment of myself a short time before God called him to his everlasting reward in heaven. At the time of my acceptance of the nomination to the episcopacy, I promised our Holy Father my obedience and respect. I promise that same obedience and respect to his successor.

To His Excellency Most Rev. Jean Jadot, Apostolic Delegate to the United States of America, who has honored our Diocese of Great Falls with his first visit to Eastern Montana, I also express my gratitude and appreciation for his charity, kindness and concern expressed in various and innumerable ways.

To Archbishop Thomas Power, the Archbishop of Portland and Metropolitan for our own Diocese of Great Falls, I am most grateful for his sharing with me the sacrament of Holy Orders as well as Bishop Alfred Abramowicz, Auxiliary Bishop of Chicago, who assisted him. In a special way, I am extremely happy for the assistance of Most Rev. Eldon Schuster, fourth Bishop of Great Falls, whose presence and participation in this ordination and installation, is but another sign of his own personal encouragement and support for myself, but also an acknowledgement that the future is rooted in the contribution which Bishop Schuster has made to the Diocese of Great Falls for over 40 years as a priest and bishop of this diocese.

To the other attending Archbishops, bishops, and abbots, I extend my deep gratitude and appreciation for your presence and participation in this ordination and installation.

To Msgr. Andrew Zarek, the Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese, who since last December has maintained the unity and spirit of the diocese, I am most grateful.

To all the members of the Committees involved in the preparation and planning for this celebration, there is a special word of thanks. The effort, energy and generosity of time and talent is obvious to all - and again, the words may seem inadequate, but they are expressed in the all encompassing phrase of "thank you."

To those who have prepared this liturgy and the music that has been so conducive to a spirit of prayer and worship, a special words of thanks is due, and especially to the choir which has been assembled from all parts of the diocese.

All all the priests, religious, deacons and people of this diocese of Great Falls who have been so kind and gracious in receiving me, I am especially grateful.

To the priests and people and family and friends of my former diocese, I also say thank you. To all of you who have come so far to be present with me

on this joyous occasion - people from Santa Maria del Popolo, St. Frances of Rome, the Archdiocesan Council of Catholic Women and St. Paul of the Cross, thank you for sharing with me these past twenty years the meaning and understanding of Church. In a special way to the presbyterate of the Archdiocese of Chicago and the community of St. Mary of the Lake Seminary, I am especially indebted for the challenge, support and encouragement they have consistently given me. And to His Eminence John Cardinal Cody, Archbishop of Chicago, who is unable to be with us because of the preparation for the conclave in Rome, I also express my thanks and appreciation.

And finally to my family and friends, many of whom have come here to be present for this celebration, I again say "thank you." It is your love, support and prayers which have sustained me in the past and will sustain me in the years to come. To Bart and Peg, Eileen and Dennis and the gift of the nephews and nieces they have shared with me, thank you. And among the dead, I especially give thanks to my parents who shared their gift of life, and love and faith with me, a patrimony and a legacy which has enriched me all the days of my life. For my parents and all the deceased members of my family and friends, I promise my prayers in gratitude for their gifts to me.

And so to all the living as well as the many dead, I promise an enduring remembrance at the altar of God.

As might well be expected, the decision to accept this sacred office was not an easy one. However, this decision became easier when I realized that it would be an action not of mine alone, but of the Lord and of his people. Despite weakness and failings, it became obvious that a man asked to be a bishop in the Church today is asked because of the presbyterate and people of which he is a part. The priests and people who have come long distances to be here with us for this ordination and installation are the resource through which the Lord has shared his gifts with me. And they become the basis for my trust and hope in God the Father, Son and Spirit. Through the priests and people have been a part of my life up to this point, I have found out what it means to trust and hope in the Lord - and the result of this is a joy and hope that will hopefully sustain me all the days of my life.

However, the trust and faith which I have in the Lord still needs to be strengthened through your prayers and mine. And so I believe I am most fortunate

that the faith and trust required of me in the Lord will be made evident through the Spirit who lives and works in the priests, deacons, religious and laity of the Diocese of Great Falls.

Montana is known as "The Treasure State". The motto of our great state of Montana is "Gold and Silver," I have already discovered the gold and silver that is incarnate in the lives of people who comprise this community and I am becoming more and more aware of the richness of the gift that has been given to me to spend my life as the Bishop of Great Falls in service to God, to the Church and to all of you. As I drove across the state these past few days, the yellow and gold panorama of hay and wheat become like a huge monstrance containing the presence of God in the beauty of nature and the lives of people. The very products of the land become the elements which bring us here together for the first time in the celebration of Eucharist. And those elements of bread and wine reflect not only our brokenness and fragility, but also announce the potential which we have as a people to incarnate the Lord.

I think you have a right to know from the start the response to two questions. First, how do I view the Church today? The response to that question is rooted in the motto which I have chosen which contains the title of the Conciliar Constitution of Vatican II of The Church in the Modern World. I hope that together we will be able to have this document come more alive in our parishes, in our diocese, and within our own lives. This document sees the Church as a Pilgrim People of God who share a belief, a hope, and a love. The Church is presented as a caring and nourishing group of people to one another and to the world at large. The Church, in the perspective of Vatican II, is a servant Church to the poor, the hungry, the oppressed. The Church becomes the sign of the presence of Jesus, a presence which is asked to make a difference in the lives of people.

The Church is likewise challenged to be a visible Church which not only announces and proclaims the Gospel of Jesus, but is asked to live it. This Church appreciates the dignity of all persons - male and female, young and old, rich or poor, black or white, Native American or recent immigrant. This Church must likewise be aware of its mission to witness, to evangelize, and to teach and to see its educational mission in terms of the culture and the times of today. We are a Church with an educational mission to the young, but also to the adult. We are a Church which cries out for growth and understanding of the mystery of our faith on

the part of the bishop, priests and laity - and so the educational mission of the Church embraces all of us as agents and catalysts and receivers of the Good News.

We are a Church with a visible sense of unity, but also a community which allows for the diversity that is possible and encouraged within that unity. At the same time, this unity calls for order and the consequent laws and structures are not impediments to freedom, but rather protectors of it.

We are a Church which lives in the modern world in the context of other religious beliefs and creeds. To the ecumenical community of this diocese, I pledge my own cooperation in advancing the kingdom of God and I appreciate their presence here this evening. To the media and to the cultural, political, educational and economic elements of Eastern Montana, I pledge my own support and interest on behalf of the Catholic Church which lives in the modern world today.

And finally, this Church, which is described in the Constitution of Vatican II, sees the heart of the Church lived out in family life and recognizes its future in the youth of our community. And it is fitting that the first time we come together as Bishop, priests and people, we do so in the context of the Eucharist which is the focal point for our identity as a people of God.

Secondly, I think you have a right to know what kind of Bishop I would like to be.

Most of all, I would like to be a pastor to the people of the Diocese. I would like to be a brother and friend to the priests and deacons who share with me the responsibility and privilege to proclaim the Gospel, to celebrate the Eucharist and other sacraments and to gather together the community.

I would like to be a Bishop who would animate and facilitate the work of the Lord among the community.

I would like to be a Bishop who will recognize and support the ministry to which we are all called by reason of Baptism, a ministry which today in the Church is taking on new forms and directions.

I would like to be a Bishop who will enable and empower the priests and people of this diocese through a mutual trust, respect, and dialogue with one another which in turn will enable and empower me.

I would like to be a Bishop who will affirm and confirm the gifts of the Spirit in all people with the final result being the affirmation and confirmation of these very same gifts within myself.

I would like to be a Bishop who will have the courage and faith to make decisions that will be helpful to the community and to the Spirit, because I have first listened to the Spirit within that very same community.

I would like to be all the above - but I know full well that I cannot begin or even take the smallest step to achieve this goal unless I am first a man of faith and prayer. And so I am fully aware that what is needed most is the grace of God and I ask your prayers for me that I might be the recipient of that grace within my life. I would like to be a holy man and that will only be possible through your prayers and mine.

A friend of mine gave me a gift when it was announced that I was to become a Bishop. He wrote a prayer-poem in which he used Peter images to describe the qualities that should be in a Bishop today. Rev. John Shea wrote:

"May your crosier be as lean as  
the prophet's staff  
and may your ring  
fit the finger of everyone."

Pray for me that my crosier may be as lean as the prophet's staff and that my ring may fit the finger of everyone. If that prayer is answered, then I know I will be able to be a good bishop because of the gifts you have shared with me!