

The Diocese of Great Falls

P.O. Box 1399

Great Falls, Montana

59403

Excerpt from the Address by Most Rev. Thomas J. Murphy
Ceremony of Ordination and Installation as Bishop of Great Falls
August 21, 1978

I think you have the 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 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. 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.

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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 in the Church today 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 of 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 that God and you have shared with me.

Most Rev. Thomas J. Murphy
Bishop of Great Falls
August 21, 1978