

WEEKLY MEMO from BMW

Date: August 7, 2014
From: Bishop Michael W. Warfel
To: Clergy, Religious, Lay Ecclesial Ministers et al

This Friday, August 8th is the annual Jubilee Celebration for Women Religious in the Diocese. This year, we are honoring Sister Mary Dostol, OSU who celebrates 50 years as a Religious and Sister Claudellen Pentecost, CHM who celebrates 60 years as a Religious. They have witnessed to the values of the Gospel for 50 and 60 years respectively. I admire their commitment and publicly thank them for their wonderful service as well as the witness of their faith. In their many years of good and faithful service, they have encouraged and helped many of God's people and shown others what it means to live a life in Christ. I pray that the Lord may continue to use them as fruitful and life giving daughters of God.

This coming weekend, I'll be in Billings for a home Mass and gathering, Saturday. I'll be at the 8:00 AM Mass at St. Patrick's on Sunday August 10th. On Monday, the Poor Clares celebrate the Feast of St. Clare. I'll be celebrating the Mass.

I'm getting ready to do a bit of hiking. On Saturday, August 16th, I'll be going out with a group of young people from Great Falls parishes on an annual day hike in the Great Falls area. The following week, I'll be on a three day hike with Pat Haggarty and another gentleman from Missoula in the Anaconda-Pintler Wilderness. Later in the month, I'll be spending 8 days hiking in the Wind River Range. And that should probably do it for hiking this summer.

Because of requests that I receive every year with regard to the location of Tabernacles in churches, I thought I would offer the following:

The placement of the Tabernacle in which the Blessed Sacrament is reserved can generate lively discussion and strong emotions. Traveling around eastern Montana, I have noted a variety of locations for the Tabernacle in churches. Though the location of the Tabernacle in a particular church is often a matter of history (it has always been where it is at), the location may also indicate the theological and liturgical understanding of the pastor and the parish community he serves. Of course, the architecture of a particular church building often dictates where the Tabernacle may best be located.

Since becoming bishop of Great Falls-Billings, I've received requests from time-to-time to transfer a Tabernacle to a new location. These requests usually have come during a time of transition and the appointment of a new pastor, administrator or parish life coordinator. There have also been occasions in which I discovered only after the fact that a Tabernacle was relocated. In my judgment, some of these changes have been anything but good! It is important to emphasize that a decision of where the Tabernacle is located ultimately resides with the judgment of the diocesan bishop (G.I.R.M #314/5).

Thus no priest, administrator or parish life coordinator may move the location of the Tabernacle without the express permission of the bishop. Obviously, any request to do so must be accompanied by a rationale for moving it. Likewise, if permission to relocate a Tabernacle is given, proper catechesis must accompany the transition.

For some parishioners, the placement of the Tabernacle may not seem to be all that important. This could be an indication of a poor appreciation of our theology about the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. For others, there can be such an emphasis on the reserved Sacrament in the Tabernacle that it essentially takes precedence over the liturgical action of the Mass and focus on the altar from which the Eucharist is born.

In my judgment, there are a number of legitimate locations for the Tabernacle: at center of the apse toward the back of the sanctuary; in the sanctuary but off toward the side; on a "side" Altar toward the front of the church; in a special Chapel but organically attached to the church and near the worship area. My preferred location is for the Tabernacle to be placed somewhere at the front of the worship space but toward the side. This is because the focus during Mass is not on the Tabernacle but on the action taking place on the Altar. Confusion can result if there is too close a proximity with the Altar and the Tabernacle. Jesus instituted the Eucharist, after all, not merely to be viewed, but to be consumed. At the same time, there is a long tradition of adoration of the Eucharist in the Church. Given a diminished appreciation of the presence of Christ in the Eucharistic species, it is important to affirm and reaffirm our teaching of the real presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. The placement of the reserved Blessed Sacrament should be readily visible and easily recognized. There are many who desire to pray before the Blessed Sacrament before and after Mass or simply to pray during a time when there is no Mass. Where there are special chapels dedicated to reservation of the Blessed Sacrament, they should be adequate in size to accommodate a number of people who may wish to pray before the Blessed Sacrament and should be suitably decorated. As a special chapel of reservation, it should be easily recognized as the place of adoration and should never double as a "cry room" or a part time storage facility. There are special chapels of reservation that suitably serve as a place to celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation.

As such, the following procedure must be followed: 1) the bishop must be notified in writing about a proposal to change the location of the Tabernacle. The request must provide a rationale for the change of location; 2) placement of the Tabernacle must be complimentary to the architecture of the particular church building; 3) care must be taken, when the Tabernacle is located behind the Altar that it not cause any confusion between the celebration of the Mass and private adoration of the Sacred Species; 4) in new or renovated spaces, placement of the Tabernacle must adhere to the GIRM and be clearly visible to all entering the church.

Given the seemingly endless not to mention ever growing violence throughout the Middle East, I suggest the following prayer:

*God of Compassion, hear the cries of those in our world
who suffer from violence and end their affliction.*

*Bring healing and comfort to those who mourn the dead.
Strengthen the resolve of those in neighbor warring
countries to accept and welcome refugees.*

*Convert the hearts of those who have taken up arms out of hatred,
and protect those who have committed their lives to peaceful resolutions.*

*God of hope, inspire leaders to choose peace over violence
and, as the Gospel teaches us, to seek reconciliation with enemies.*

*Inspire the Church around the world to have compassion
for all people in the Middle East
Provide those who dwell in the midst of violence with hope for
a future of peace built on justice for all.*

*We ask this through Jesus Christ,
Prince of Peace and Light of the World.*

Amen.