

Reflections on Priestly Ordination

by Fr Daniel Maurer, C.J.D.

As the New Year begins it is a bit late to write a news account of my priestly ordination which took place in Vladivostok on September 20, 1992. So instead I would like to offer some reflections on the sacrament of Holy Orders and on my service as a priest to the people of the Russian Far East.

We Catholics believe that our Lord Jesus wants to be present to us most especially in seven actions of His Church called sacraments. The seven sacraments are the most important channels through which He extends to us His own life-giving and sanctifying grace. This special presence of Jesus, the very life of God within us, comes about through these visible actions of the Church when done in faith and with the right intention. In order to be an effective means of communicating the Lord's own presence to us, each sacrament must have the proper matter and form.

The sacrament by which God calls and chooses a man to become His priest is the sacrament of Holy Orders. The proper matter of Holy Orders is a validly ordained bishop who is a successor of the twelve apostles in an unbroken chain, and a candidate who has been properly prepared and approved and who freely chooses to submit to this special vocation. The proper form of Holy Orders is the rite of ordination, usually performed during a Mass, in which the bishop lays his hands on the candidate's head and prays the solemn prayer of priestly consecration over him. By these two actions of the bishop Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit, consecrates the candidate for service, thereby giving to His Body the Church a new priest.

When our local bishop and successor of the apostles, Most Reverend Joseph Werth, S.J., extended his hands over me during the ordination ceremony, he prayed the prayer of priestly consecration in Russian. It was, very probably, the first time in the more than 1100 year history of Christianity in Russia that the prayer of priestly consecration had been used in the Russian language on Russian soil to ordain a priest. (The Orthodox ordination prayer is prayed in the Old Slavonic language. For Roman Catholics before the communist revolution it was prayed in

Latin, and since then, besides my ordination, there had only been one other public Roman Catholic ordination in Russia, which was conducted in the German language.) Here is a part of the prayer in its English translation. As you read it, please pray it for me:

"Almighty Father... renew within this servant of yours the Spirit of holiness. As a co-worker with the order of bishops may he be faithful to the ministry that he receives from you, Lord God, and be to others a model of right conduct. May he be faithful in working with the order of bishops, so that the words of the Gospel may reach the ends of the earth, and the family of nations, made one in Christ, may become God's one, holy people..."

In this prayer the bishop asked God that the Spirit of holiness be renewed within me. I too pray for that fervently. I first received this same Spirit of God at my baptism on March 18, 1951 in Hart, Michigan. It was renewed and strengthened on the day of my confirmation in St Joseph, Michigan in 1962. It lapsed during the difficult years of the late 60's and early 70's when many members of my generation seemed to take a spiritual nose dive, but through the unexpected and merciful grace of God, it was renewed again in 1974 when I returned to faith in God and was reconciled to Him and His universal Catholic Church in the sacrament of Penance after an absence of five years. This same Spirit of holiness has been kept alive in me in subsequent years by daily attendance at Mass and reception of the Lord Jesus in Holy Communion.

My purpose in reviewing my own sacramental history is not to draw attention to myself, but to illustrate the point that each one of us has a personal relationship with God that is very real and very unique, that is, it is based on and expressed in our personal, historical life experiences, many of which we can actually give a specific date to. These experiences of God's presence shape our lives in very definite ways, and if we are attentive to them and faithful to His will which He expresses through them, we find ourselves living a wonderful, meaningful and loving adventure.

Being attentive to God's will led me early on to study for the priesthood and to become a member of the religious order of Canons Regular of the Holy Cross. Eventually it led me to transfer to the Canons Regular of Jesus the Lord and to the Russian Far East where the Catholic Church is reestablishing its ministry among the people of Vladivostok and the Primorya (Maritime) Region. The prayer of priestly consecration asks God "that the words of the Gospel may reach the ends of the earth..." It is a mystery of His

love why the Lord ever chose me to help Him realize this goal, but if there was any doubt that I really am at the end of the earth, it was recently dispelled by no less a personage than Pope John Paul II.

In November Anastacia Potapenko, a young member of our parish was chosen to go to Rome as the Russian Far East delegate to a conference of CARITAS, the international Catholic relief agency. While there she had the privilege of speaking personally with the Holy Father. He asked her where she came from and she replied, "Vladivostok," which prompted the Holy Father to exclaim, "Vladivostok, the end of the earth!"

Though all Christians are called to spread the Gospel, I never planned to be a foreign missionary. And though I majored in East Asian Studies in college, I never planned to live in Russian Far East Asia. It must be God himself who led me here. I am happy to respond because the spiritual needs of our people are so great and because it gives me the opportunity to continue the wonderful adventure of my relationship with the Lord. And now it has given me the incomparable privilege of becoming His priest.

The specific task of the priest is to lead the Church in prayer, especially to offer again the Sacrifice of Christ on the Cross in the celebration of the Mass and to reconcile people to God through the sacrament of Penance by the forgiveness of their sins. The priest is also to be of service to God's people in whatever way his bishop or religious superior asks him. All priests take a solemn promise of obedience to their bishop or religious superior in whom they recognize God communicating His will for them. It is a source of immense joy for me that I was able to take this promise of obedience to Bishop Joseph Werth, and to become, in the words of the prayer of priestly consecration, his co-worker. He is truly a man in whom the presence of Jesus Christ shines forth. It is easy to experience in him the meaning of Jesus' words to His apostles in the Gospel of Matthew 10:40, "He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives him who sent me."

Bishop Werth's task of leading the faithful in the most extensive diocese in the world and with only about 25 priests compels me to redouble my efforts to learn Russian as quickly as possible so that I can truly be his co-worker and lighten his immense burden. I also pray every day and ask for your prayers for an increase in priestly and religious vocations in the Russian Far East. Whole cities of hundreds of thousands of people are without the services of any

priests, either Catholic or Orthodox. The spiritual needs of the people are truly unimaginable to most Americans who have grown up surrounded by many different religious institutions. If you are a young man reading this, please consider if the Lord might be calling you to respond to the great needs of His people and His Church in Russia by becoming a missionary priest, perhaps even a member of the Canons Regular of Jesus the Lord in Vladivostok.

The prayer of priestly consecration expresses one of my most fervent desires. It asks God to use the work of the priest so that "the family of nations, made one in Christ, may become God's one, holy people." Russia and the United States were divided by a bitter cold war for decades. Most people in the West have heard something of the unprecedented terror and repression that the communists used to enslave an entire people for generations. Eventually their ideology collapsed under its own weight, and the people of Russia now have an opportunity to experience some of the freedom and openness that we in the West have grown accustomed to. The peoples of what used to be two different worlds have the opportunity to experience the unity of friendship once again.

Let us pray with all our hearts that this greater unity in civil society may soon be extended to religion where the Church of Our Lord Jesus continues to be divided among Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant, and where in a sense, the cold war of division still simmers. Despite some recent problems between the Catholics and Orthodox in the Ukraine, our two apostolic Churches, united for the first thousand years of Christian history, are very close to one another in beliefs and the important traditions. We have the same bible and the same sacraments. We recognize the validity of each other's priesthood and Holy Eucharist. Many Orthodox also recognize that the Pope, as the Bishop of Rome and successor of St Peter, has a certain primacy of honor among all the bishops of the world. It is not too much to hope that soon, maybe even by the 2000th anniversary of the birth of our Savior, our two Churches will be united again around the table of the Lord at Mass. That will truly be a happy day.

Jesus the Lord promised that the gates of hell would not prevail against the Church built on the rock of Peter (Matthew 16:18). As Catholics we believe that the Pope, the successor of Peter, serves all Christians as the visible symbol of the unity of the Church in Christ our Head, and as the defender of the truths of the faith. If we remain united to Peter's successor, we are assured by Christ

Himself of remaining in His Truth. Let us pray not that the Orthodox Churches will "return to Rome" but that our two different apostolic traditions, East and West, will once again share communion with each other, and that all Christians will recognize the authority of the Pope as the necessary servant of unity and truth. To this end I would like to dedicate my priestly ministry among the people of Russia, that we all may become "God's one, holy people."

The Three T's

To do any job, you need the "Three T's"--you know, Time, Talent, and Treasure! All three are what we don't have enough of! Thanks to you, our benefactors, we are saving a lot of time now by being able to use our "microautobus" or our jeep, but being in the process of establishing five new parishes as well as taking care of our own is obviously stretching our time.

Our talent is being stretched with the help of a crew of wonderful workers. Would you like to meet them? We'll try to include pictures in the newsletter, but here is a little list:

Igor Davydov, our rugged and faithful translator who is now working on our correspondence courses for those who live far from Vladivostok, are homebound, or in the military or prison. He has too much work, so currently two other people are helping with translations: Nicolai Kazakov and Lena Solop.

Anastacia Potapenko, our parish secretary, who not only keeps official records of sacraments and our membership list, but recently founded our Sunday School program for the kids, and is beginning a branch of CARITAS, the charitable organization here in Vladivostok.

Tanya Yankelevich, our engineer who is ever on the road on tasks related to the return and renovation of our building. When she is not on the road she is busy at the computer generating documents for everything under the sun.

Dennis Bandaryev, our evangelization director, who spends most of his time at the TV studio arranging our weekly television program, when he isn't wringing his hands about the lack of video materials to broadcast.

Anatoly Stashkoff, our driver, who keeps the vehicles in running order, and knows every hole in the road and every back alley, and who dealt with the mountain of bureaucratic paper needed to buy our cars.

Alexander Kovalevsky, the miracle shopper who can find anything in a place where there is nothing. If he can't find it, he will make it for you!

Zina-Ida Pukalova and Valentina Smoktal who spend hours standing in line in the stores looking for things to eat, and then prepare delicious meals. They also take care of our apartment and clothing.

Irina Nomokonova, a pert lawyer who gives us advice when we need it about the bureaucratic mountain mentioned above.

Yadviga Charnetskaya, the parish bookkeeper who has plenty to do dealing with the parish books, so our mission books are still handled in Alaska.

We can't forget our Russian language teachers who struggle with our inabilities: Marina Stupnitskaya, Irina Vacilevna, and Lydia Kovbas.

It isn't the end yet. In Alaska Ray Rzeszut handles our mail, your donations, and ships things to us, and dealing with electronic mail.

And in California Tom Fitzsimmons takes care of most of our first class mail and phone calls going to the States--a real lifeline which breaks our isolation from being "at the end of the earth".

Finally, we mention Father Joseph Fessio and his associates at Ignatius Press, Donna Fong and Roxanne Lum and more, who are always on the lookout for ways to help us.

Without this galaxy of talent, what could we do? What is missing from this list? You see we need more PRIESTS! Thanks be to God today (January 3) the first young man from among our Russian converts spoke to us about being a priest. It will take time, of course, and meanwhile we are beginning five parishes.

Then there comes treasure. Dear benefactors, our possibilities here are nearly limitless for doing God's work, but it all takes \$'s, and donated items. We have received rosaries, and many books. Books, bibles, magazines, and newspapers are expensive and difficult to find because history has left us a big, yawning gap of materials in the Russian language. Russians are great readers, and are always looking for Catholic materials to read. So we translate a lot, but we must print these things, or buy books overseas at prices we can't afford. Now we are thinking about the future support of our seminarians. And the needs of five additional parishes. I hope you noticed in our list of helpers above that we don't have an office in America to solicit funds (we can't afford it!), and our American helpers are volunteers. You can volunteer, too. Ask your parish or organization, or your friends, to make a donation to our mission. Pray for us. Remember us when

you count how good God has been to you. Recently one of our benefactors told us that her mother always prayed for the conversion of Russia. Now that it is a possibility, she sent us the money she received from her mother's will, so that her mother's prayers are continued in the missionaries who are actually in Russia to preach the Gospel!

Please don't send money or objects directly to us--it will all disappear into a black hole that is located somewhere over central Asia. Money and letters should be sent to Alaska: Vladivostok Mission, 225 Cordova Street, Anchorage AK 99501. Donated items should be shipped to California: Vladivostok Mission, %Mahoney Exports, 1730-B Third Street, San Francisco CA 94107

God bless you. Pray for vocations. Yours truly,
--Father Myron

"I was ill and you comforted me." (Matt 25: 36)

One of the most rewarding tasks of parish ministry is the regular visits to our sick and shut-in parishioners and others who come to our attention. Both Father Myron and Father Dan make frequent sick calls in homes and in hospitals, often bringing with them the Blessed Sacrament.

At first many of our people were surprised that their priests would take the time to see them outside of Church. This is explained by the fact that none of them has ever known a time of religious freedom where Catholic priests had the possibility to work openly among their people. Also, the Russian Orthodox Church, with many more members than the Catholics, and suffering under one of the worst persecutions in Christian History, did not have priests enough to say Mass and baptize their people, to say nothing of making house calls.

One of our parishioners who receives a regular visit from us is Tamara who lives next door to our former church building. She was baptized a Catholic as a child in the Ukraine but was never able to practice her faith. As an adult wife and mother she moved to the Far East with her family. Now she is widowed and her son lives hundreds of miles away. Tamara has been confined to her bed for 16 years with the progressively degenerative disease of multiple sclerosis. At this point she can only move her head, mouth and eyes. Her sister Maria takes excellent care of her. Their apartment, though sparsely furnished, is always clean and fragrant. Maria, an Orthodox, has a collection of Russian icons in the living room. In Tamara's bedroom are prominently displayed a crucifix and a picture of Mary as the Mystical Rose, both of which she received from our Catholic parish. Our bishop paid a visit to Tamara during his first trip to Vladivostok in August. We are all impressed by her gentle humor and her quiet dignity.

Once when Father Dan was visiting Julia Adamovna, one of our elderly parishioners on an extensive stay in the neurological section of the State Hospital, all the ladies in her ward wanted to meet with him and learn more about the Christian Faith. He did not have enough time in his schedule that day, but a few days later he went back with Igor as translator and had a wonderful time talking about Jesus and the Church to the eighteen ladies in Julia's ward.

A sadder situation is the condition of Vitaly Trofimovich. He suffers

from muscular dystrophy and is confined to bed. But Vitaly (the name means lively and describes well his personality) has no family to care for him. When found by a policeman called to his building for another reason, he was living in squalor and filth, with only the occasional help of an alcoholic acquaintance squatter to cook for him.

Seven months before Father Dan's first visit, he had fallen and broken his hip. But his visiting doctor (socialized medicine) had failed to diagnose the break which had never healed properly. With the help of Valentina, a friend of ours who is a doctor, we got Vitaly admitted to a hospital for an operation to reset his hip. But there are limits to what we can do because the hospitals are so full and the bureaucracy so agonizingly slow. Vitaly has been there for over three weeks, but still no operation. On one of Valentina's visits to the hospital, she discovered that he had not eaten anything for two days.

Please pray for all the sick and suffering members of our parish and especially all those in Russia who have no one to care for them in this time of transition from socialism to a market economy. The needs are so great. Perhaps someone reading this letter would like to be a medical missionary or donate some time giving medical or dental care to the people of Vladivostok.

Don't Stop the Music

The special work of all communities of canons regular is to pray the public prayer of the Church solemnly for and with the people.

Paraphrasing St Paul's letter to the Romans (10:14-15), we can ask: But how can the people pray solemnly unless they sing, and how can they sing unless there be music, and how can there be music unless there be musicians and a choir?

Our parish might be small in number, but it is very big in talent with a number of members involved in the local performing arts community.

(Vladivostok is a cultural center, with two symphony orchestras, a standing theater company, two musical colleges that grant advanced degrees, and frequent visits from nationally renowned musicians.)

Brother Dan began to organize some of that talent in July, and, with the purchase of a small Casio electronic keyboard in August, our parish choir was reborn. It made its public debut on the feast of the Assumption which the parish celebrated with an outdoor Mass and procession at the site of its former church building high on the hill overlooking the beautiful Golden Horn Bay. As a post-communion meditation song, the choir sang a Russian translation of the "Hail Mary" (Raduicya Maria) in three part harmony.

The organist is Annya Gafurova, a very talented keyboard artist in her third year of piano studies at the Art Institute. The original seven members have now increased to 12, quite evenly balanced between seven women and five men. None of the members had ever had an opportunity to attend a Catholic Mass until the Canons Regular of Jesus the Lord arrived six months before, so for the first few months part of each rehearsal was spent learning the principles of Catholic liturgy and the role of the choir in helping the congregation to sing.

From the first Sunday after they arrived in the country, even before the choir was organized, the canons began to teach their parishioners to sing. Finding good liturgical hymns with both Russian words and music notation was a challenge. Public Latin rite Catholicism had been totally destroyed in all of Asian Russia, and most of the music from before the revolution would have been in Latin or Polish. Igor (The Intrepid) Davydov borrowed a protestant hymn book from the Seventh Day Adventists, and before Mass each Sunday, Father Myron taught the congregation to sing *a capella* the melodies that he knew. Early favorites included versions of "The Old Rugged Cross", and "What a Friend we have in Jesus" (Russian title: Praised be the

Name of Jesus). Who says there is no advantage growing up in the Bible Belt of Southern Indiana! The parish favorites soon became "Holy God We Praise Thy Name" and "Immaculate Mary", which was translated from English by Igor.

Even without musical accompaniment, our parishioners love to sing at Mass. But these few hymns were not enough on which to found a choir. Then Sr Valentina, the Bishop's housekeeper in Novosibirsk sent a small booklet of Catholic hymns, many of which have two- and three-part harmony. But the keyboard only has two voices suitable for church music--the "pipe organ" voice is beautiful and fills the hall with a very churchy sound, though Annya has to be careful not to turn the on/off switch to "accompaniment" or she could find herself playing "Ave Maria" to the bossa nova beat.

The latest acquisition of the choir is a full set of music for all the sung parts of the Russian Mass. Father Dan "discovered" it at Notre Dame de Lourdes Church in St Petersburg when he was there with his parents for his post ordination vacation. Because Notre Dame is the property of the French government, it was never closed, even during the 900-day siege of Leningrad by the Nazis during World War II. It has been in continuous operation, providing our choir with liturgical music resources, and it has given our newly reborn choir enough music for some time. For that we sing joyfully to God in psalms, hymns and inspired songs, giving praise to the Lord with all our hearts (Ephesians 5:19).

Nastya Potapenko invited to Rome

Our parish secretary, Anastacia Potapenko, was invited by the international Catholic charitable organization CARITAS to attend their conference in Rome in December. It was a surprise for her, because she had never been out of Russia before. She was invited because her experience as a founding member of our parish, as a mother of two, and as parish secretary puts her in touch with the needs of people of our region. It was extraordinarily difficult for her to arrange to travel on such short notice, but she later said that it was like a miracle that everything worked out, and she found herself in Rome! The highlight of her trip was meeting Pope John Paul II himself in the private audience which was arranged for the group of seven Russians attending the meeting. After the trip Bishop Werth asked her to begin organizing CARITAS here in the Far East. The nearest branch is in Novosibirsk, which is thousands of miles away.

Yadviga Francivna's Search for Remains

For fifty years Yadviga Francivna, one of the founding members of our parish, has searched for the burial place of her brother, Stanislaus, who was killed during the Stalin repression of religion and of opposition to communism. Many were killed at the same time, and buried in mass graves. Finally she found the site on a military reservation near Vladivostok. Together with others whose family members had disappeared or who themselves were imprisoned for a while, Yadviga worked to dedicate a memorial on the site. On August 1, Father Myron and Orthodox Father Valentine together blessed the monument, after many speeches of memory of those slain and of those imprisoned. Later, Bishop Werth visited the site to pray for the deceased.

New Weekly Television Program

On October 21 our parish began broadcasting a weekly 1-1/2 hour religious program on Vladivostok Channel 3. At this time we are using mostly video materials received from Dallas TX, from the organization "The Way Home". We must translate, edit, and dub our own program. This is being done by our evangelization director, Dennis Bandaryev, who joined the Catholic Church last spring and was confirmed by Bishop Werth when he was in Vladivostok on August 23. This project is very expensive, but we felt obligated to proceed because we were offered the broadcast time at a very reasonable cost, and we considered that if we didn't broadcast, someone else with a different message would. Now we are struggling to keep this program on the air, needing funds and video materials. Two programs so far have been made from local materials: One about our church building and the coming of our priests, and the other about baptism, showing our baptismal liturgy. We are hoping to produce more of our own materials in the future, but we are hampered by lack of funds.

Photo legends:

The Baptism and Confirmation class of November 1, 1992. The liturgy was shown on television.

Nastya Potapenko congratulating Father Dan on his ordination.

Father Dan, Bishop Werth, Nastya, Father Myron, and Igor Davydov.

The priestly ordination of Father Dan Maurer. Father Joseph Messmer on the left. September 20, 1992.

The Parish Choir organized and in uniform for the ordination mass.

View of Golden Horn Bay from the Trade Union School where Father Dan was ordained.

Parish dinner after the ordination at "The Wave" restaurant in the Sea Terminal in Vladivostok.

The Confirmation of Dennis Bondaryev by Bishop Werth.

Father Myron, Bishop Werth, and Yadviga Francivna at the memorial of those slain during the Stalin repression.

Help us to open the door of our church! Mass has not been celebrated inside our Church since at least 1935. The cross was even removed from over the door. The stained glass windows were removed, but even the plain ones haven't been repaired. The City Council of Vladivostok decided on September 30 that the city didn't need the building any more. Now we are waiting for the Krai (State) Council to return it to us. When we receive it, it will be a great day for the Catholics of Vladivostok, but we will then need to completely repair the building from 70 years of vandalism and neglect. Who can help us?

Father Dan's mother, June (Mrs Roger) Maurer at the Mary altar on his ordination day.

Father Dan's ordination mass. Father Messmer, Father Dan, Bishop Werth, and Father Myron.