***Today I Am Stepping Out***

I remember once at a Convention after making a passionate plea for the protection of Anglo Catholics hearing two remarks from two new bishops (1) “Is he married?” (2) “He’s the blue-collar bishop.” At the end of my comments, where quite honestly, I was simply Defending the Faith once delivered, another bishop rose and said, “Well that wouldn’t fly with my constituents.” I replied, “Thank you bishop, but it will play in Peoria.” In my 47 years of ordination, I have now seen and heard things that I would have never believed, and as much as I loved my parents — staunch Anglicans as they were, I am glad that they did not have to see and hear many of those things.

In reverse order:

(1)I am saddened to think that the flocks committed to our care are “constituents,” and I am grateful that Holy Scripture does not say that “He (Jesus) laid down His life for His constituents.” Constituents’ votes changed rather significantly, didn’t it. (“Hosanna” — “Crucify”). Maybe that’s why I have never trusted the voices of the crowd (including some Conventions) — because I see what damage the crowd can do.

(2) Although I am not certain if it was a compliment “He’s the blue-collar bishop,” it is one of my favorite honors. We should never forget where and how we were raised, and if being a blue-collar bishop means that I speak for those without an official voice, then I am grateful. None of my grandparents graduated from high school — they were born “overseas” and my father finished his formal education in the 9th grade, but as he was wont to say, he had little schooling and an extraordinary education. He read the Classics, and he abhorred profanity — which was a second language in the steel mills where my grandfather and he and then I worked. He believed that profanity was an indication that one had a limited vocabulary, and he insisted that we learn appropriate words to express ourselves. I am also an Anglo-Catholic. Our “expression” is quite easy to understand. We believe that we are a continuation of the Church that was brought to the British Isles — founded in Jerusalem — but we also believe that we are heirs of a revival, commonly called the Tractarian or Oxford Movement. Although those who led the Revival were well educated, cultured men, the primary emphases were clear: Worship the King of Kings with splendor, honor, and glory and treat those who worship the King as royalty, since they are sons and daughters of the King. When Anglo-Catholics get “off track” it is often when they do not hold these two critical points in tension and fall into either Worship without connectivity as an end in and of itself or a Social Action which fights for the needs and rights of those whom they deem to be “dispossessed” to the exclusion of “worship(ing)” the Lord in the beauty of Holiness. I would contend that the former is simply “high church” and the latter is simply “social action with a drop of religion.” We Anglo-Catholics have long been misunderstood, but we are often the ones who have contributed to a misunderstanding by either forgetting our passion for worshiping God or forgetting our passion for feeding, clothing, and housing those whom many people would not even want to have in their churches.

(3) Today is our youngest child’s 45th birthday. She is a remarkable daughter, wife, mother and educator. She works in settings where some people would be afraid to walk alone without protection. Her 49-year-old sister has that passion, too, and teaches in a way that those who fall between the cracks suddenly have a stage. Their brother, who is 50 has the same vision and passion for God and His people as his sisters do, and when I consider the ministry he does with the “outcasts,” I see the many times that his mother and sisters and now nieces and nephew have stood with him in that ministry and he stands with them in theirs. Our children have never forgotten the connection between “The Altar and the World.” They see the Mass as a foretaste of Heaven, and they have no constituents — only God’s children — and as our Eagle Scout Son (and son-in-law) remind people, Scouting teaches you to leave the campsite better than you found it.

Now my dear wife of 56 years. “Is he married?” Wow. I have been blessed to see my hands and my feet in places where I would have never ventured to go but God gave me a wife who has enhanced every element of the ministry in which I have been engaged. She more than left a campsite better - she planned it, decorated it, and brought in more people to do the same. When our children were still living at home and we gathered each night for family prayer, when I was not there because I was called to see someone in jail or the hospital, or take them out of a bar before they were arrested, my wife would say, “Let’s pray for Daddy, because God is using him right now and he is helping someone. Aren’t we proud of Daddy?” Not once did she express resentment when I was absent, nor did she convey that spirit to our children. She has made it possible for me to say “yes” to God, because she has said “yes” to God, too, so it is quite natural that her three children share that passion for serving God. She taught them to say “yes” to God.

So, as we conclude the secular year, I simply needed to “step out” with you, and even though I am not so much into a secular “New Year’s Resolution” (I wait until Lent for that) my resolve is that I ask God to never let me forget where I am from in terms of the Catholic Faith and my upbringing, and that He never let me forget that I not where I am today because of anything I did on my own. In the end, it is all Grace, and it is all about putting Jesus first.