***“All Bishops and other Ministers.”***

***“Maybe that’s why we hang a picture of our Bishop –***

***so we don’t forget who he is.”***

Growing up in the Church, and hearing at every Mass, prayers for “...all Bishops and other Ministers”…as is the case with the “Prayer for the Whole State of Christ’s Church,” we knew we were praying for our Bishop, but we didn’t always know his name. This led a few of us to consider that the reason why we hung a picture of our Bishop, in our churches, is so we wouldn’t forget what he looked like, since we hardly ever saw him. When we finally did see him, we thought that he didn’t look very much like his picture, until we were told that he had been our Bishop for a long time. We supposed that there was great enthusiasm in sending out a picture during the first year of the new Bishop’s consecration, but that we had to accept another catechetical mystery — the mystery of aging.

Praying aloud for our Bishops by name is a relatively “new” feature as it relates to the Book of Common Prayer, although, in truth, it is a revival of the ancient practice of naming our Bishop at every Mass. Nonetheless, Prayer Book “fundamentalists” prior to 1967 would NEVER add or subtract from the Liturgy as printed, in whatever Book of Common Prayer was in use. In 1967 “The Liturgy of the Lord’s Supper” was printed, and quickly there followed, the Green Book, the Zebra Book, the Son of Zebra Book, the Draft Proposed Book…with many etcetera. There are those Prayer Book fundamentalists, however, who would continue the use of THE Prayer Book, and if they did, they realized that there was no place (being obedient to the rubrics) where names were placed…for the sick….for the clergy…for the departed, etc. Perhaps that’s what the bulletin was for in those day!

In the age of Liturgical Renewal, and with the recovery of the Prayers of the Faithful (called the “Prayers of the People” — not the historical name — but descriptive) people could now hear the names of the Bishops…AND we were actually praying for them! Considering all that was happening in the Church in those days, it makes one wonder what might have happened if people actually had been praying for their bishops, daily by name! Of course, with the availability of a variety of “Prayers of the People” including rubrical permission in the “Prayer for the Whole State…” people were now hearing the names of bishops other than their own: a Presiding Bishop and/or an Archbishop or two and in some places even Patriarchs, with whom we were not in Communion.

Having been brought up with virtually every type of Eastern Rite (both Orthodox and “R.C.” Byzantine) I was quite taken by the fact that at every Divine Liturgy the Priest who is celebrating, at the Prosphoron in the “Liturgy of Preparation” prays for the Bishop who ordained him. I have been overwhelmed over the years as I have attempted to do the same after being ordained a Deacon 50 years ago and a priest nearly 50 years ago. +William (may he rest in Peace.). When I was consecrated as a Bishop 30 years ago, it became a bit more complicated, but remembering at the Altar the Bishop who consecrated me, along with the co-consecrators, is a privilege. At various points in my fifteen years as a Diocesan Bishop I told my Ordinands about this Eastern Rite practice, and from time to time I receive a note or two from the many priests, whom I have ordained, who tell me that they pray for me at every Mass they celebrate. This is a very humbling gift.

At this point in my life and ministry I am assured of the prayers of two Dioceses: the Diocese of Quincy where I am the Eighth Bishop and also Bishop Vicar, and the Diocese of Fort Worth where I serve as an Assisting Bishop to the Diocesan Bishop. At every Mass in those two dioceses, I can be assured of being named: Alberto/Ryan our Diocesan Bishop and Keith our Bishop Vicar/Assisting Bishop.

I wonder if people ever consider how important it is for a bishop to have the certainty of prayer. I know that when we are sick or when it’s our birthday, that people say a prayer — BUT to have a Liturgical Tradition where we pray for our Bishops by name is a blessing beyond measure. I can remember being told in seminary in Sacramental Theology that priests must “take many things to the grave.” I am also aware that as a Bishop I will be taking even more to the grave. “To whom much has been given, much will be required.”

I recognize that when “the Bishop” comes on a Sunday, the natural rhythm of a parish can be disrupted. I recall vividly, a priest telling me that “a good Bishop is one who comes annually, celebrates Mass, preaches, Baptizes and Confirms, and then leaves me alone for a year.” Fortunately, that has not been my experience, but having served in the odd position for years as a “Flying Bishop” — visiting parishes that were at odds with their Bishop — I do understand that not everyone is thrilled to see their Diocesan Bishop! As another priest told me once, “Bishops are a ‘theological necessity’ for Confirmations and Ordinations.” Another priest said, “Having a Bishop present is a good opportunity to show people what a Pontifical Mass looks like.” I tend not to be overly troubled by misspoken words, but I believe that we can see that there are some who do not desire to have intimacy with their Bishop as it relates to pastoral care and oversight. Nonetheless, even they can pray, even if the prayer is to keep the bishop away!

I sincerely hope that people will pray more for bishops. In our Tradition we do not have “pastors” as a synonymous term for “clergy” (even though some mistakenly say that) rather we have Bishops, Priests and Deacons — the historic Three-fold Ministry, and our responsibilities exceed simply being a pastor. I pray that each Order will exercise pastoral leadership, but we are dependent upon the prayers of God’s people. Please pray even more intentionally for your Clergy: Bishops, Priests and Deacons, and when they retire or die...remember — there is still a place in our Liturgies for their names! There may be pictures of new Bishops hanging in the Narthex or in the Parish Hall, and names of new Priests in the bulletin and on the office door, but those who have served need our prayers, and the Clergy should consider taking on the custom and tradition of giving thanks for the Bishop who ordained them. He trusted them enough to share the Gift of Holy Orders.