



Bishop Etienne: Learn to rely on God's grace

Editor's note: The following is an interview with Bishop-elect Etienne that was done a short time after Pope Benedict XVI appointed him Bishop of the Diocese of Cheyenne.

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and there are at least 50 priest-friends who will be flying with him for your ordination. What do you think about this?

Q. You have been a priest for the past 17 years. What experience from your priesthood do you feel will best help you in serving the people of this diocese?

A. I think just learning how to be available is one of the main things. I am sure that bishops are available to people. I want to make the best use of free time to stay healthy and be present for the people. The other thing I think is very appropriate is that this is all about God's grace and learning how to rely on it. Seventeen years of priesthood have also given me a very solid practice of prayers, and I am sure I will use that as well.

Q. What is it like to be a parish priest and to get the call that you are being asked to be a bishop? And, what emotions have you experienced since being informed of your assignment to the Diocese of Cheyenne?

A. I am still just kind of floored by the whole thing. It is not a call that anyone really expects to get. You never give that a second thought. A parish priest just looks at being a parish priest. When that call comes and there is that shift of reality, there are all kinds of emotions. There is the excitement, the flattery of being asked to that office, and then the humility of 'how in the world can this be?' The moving to Wyoming and meeting all the people and the reality of leaving behind my family and parish, as a priest it is never easy to leave, and then there

is the unknown of being bishop; it is the great question of what the unknown is.

Q. When did you know you wanted to become a priest?

A. I was 33 when I was ordained. My path to the altar was a slow one. For many years, I wanted to be a successful business man, to get married and have a family. I went to college and only after a year and a half God had done a little more work on my heart and led me to pray about it. I went to the seminary. Having a wife and family was still something I was interested in. I dated again and ended up back in the seminary. It was back and forth discernment for me between priesthood and married life. In 1990, the priesthood became not just what God wanted, but what I wanted. It was really my bringing my will into God's will, and I haven't looked back since.

Q. What are you looking forward to about living in Wyoming and serving the Diocese of Cheyenne?

A. I think mostly just getting to know the people, the local church, the things that are good about it, the challenges and working with the people and the priests to meet those challenges. There is an excitement about being in that part of the west and claiming it as home.

Q. You mentioned during your first Mass at St. Mary's

Cathedral that it was most appropriate to begin this journey with the Eucharist. What does it mean to be able to have begun this way?

A. The Eucharist is just at the heart of who this is. It is the center of my spirituality and to be able to celebrate that with the people was very special to me. That is what I want to do most- to celebrate the Eucharist with the people. There has not been a moment when I haven't included the people of the diocese in my prayer. I have been holding the people of Wyoming in my heart and in my prayers.

Q. What does your prayer and spiritual life look like? How do you draw strength for the journey?

A. My day begins with prayer. It is the first thing I do. I head to the chapel and pray the liturgy of the hours, pray about what the needs of the day present. I think about individuals who have asked for prayers. I pray to God for the grace to do what he asks of me. Recently, since this phone call, I have prayed for wisdom to be a good bishop.

Q. You have chosen for your Episcopal motto, the words of St. Paul to the Ephesians (4:15), *Veritas in Caritate, Truth in Love*. Why did you choose this as your motto and how do you hope these words are a reflection of you service as bishop?

A. I have always been captured by the scripture passages that speak of truth. I have come to find that Christ is that expression of truth and of God's love, and I hope to bring those things together and to help people believe in that infinite and faithful love. Our world is in need of truth, but I believe that truth cannot be something we yield. Truth has to be presented with love and that is what conversion is all about for us.

Q. Are there important figures in the Church whose writings or words have influenced you?

A. I think St. Catherine of Siena had a tremendous impact on me. In fact, my thesis was on her. She was another one that wrote about truth in Christ. St. Ignatius of Loyola probably had a lot to do with my advanced degree in spirituality. St. Louis De Monfort has also influenced me as well. Finally, the writings of John Paul II have influenced me greatly as a seminarian and priest.

Q. Who has most influenced your decision to serve the Church?

A. Ultimately my parents, they have always had a great love and faith in the Church, and they have modeled that faith. I had an uncle who was a priest and an aunt who is a Benedictine nun. There were seminarians and priests around all time; for us, they were just members

of the family. Vocations were another realistic option for us. Then, when I worked at the bishops' conference in Washington, Father Bob Lynch, who is now Bishop Lynch of St. Petersburg in Florida, also influenced me.

Q. Tell me about growing up in Indiana. Is there a specific memory you have of experiencing your faith with your family that you cherish?

A. I have lots of memories. We were just regular church-going people. We went to Mass every Sunday and holy day. Mom was very good about the liturgical seasons and bringing them into the home. We always prayed before meals and we prayed the rosary, especially during Lent. I was a server. I cantored. I taught catechism. I have just always been a part of my parish; it has been a part of who I am in my faith and in my practice.

Q. You worked as vocations director for the Diocese of Indianapolis. What are your hopes for vocations in the Diocese of Cheyenne?

A. My hope would be that we can build on the number of vocations we have. I am looking forward to visiting with the present vocations director to see what we have done and what we can do to enhance that initiative.

Q. The Archbishop of Indianapolis chartered an airplane

A. I was floored when I heard that the archdiocese chartered a plane for the ordination. I think it is wonderful.

Q. You were the Assistant Coordinator for Papal Visits of John Paul II to the United States. What was that experience like?

A. It certainly gave me a broad experience of Church. The pope visited 10 dioceses and to be able to be involved with those visits and the leaders of the ten dioceses, working with representatives of the Vatican, and then to actually be able to travel with the pope was a unique blessing. To experience the charism of the man was incredible.

Q. How would you describe your style of leadership?

A. Collaborative is the best word to use. I like to observe. I like to listen. I like to bring people together, to make decisions and to put a vision and a plan in place and do what we can to bring it to life.

Q. Is there anything I haven't asked that you would like to share?

A. I think the main thing is I just want the people to know how excited I am. I am quite anxious. Dec. 3 to 7, I am on retreat and then I will be joining the people of the diocese on Dec. 9.

Kathrine Patton is the editor of the special bishop welcome edition.