



**Saint Thomas Church Fifth Avenue  
in the City of New York**

**The Reverend Andrew C. Mead, OBE, DD, *Rector***  
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**[www.SaintThomasChurch.org](http://www.SaintThomasChurch.org)**

**Sunday, March 2, 2003**  
*The Last Sunday after the Epiphany*

*Festal Eucharist  
at 11am*

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A Sermon by  
The Reverend Canon Harry E. Krauss

on  
II Corinthians 1:24

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*TWENTY FIVE YEARS A PRIEST*

*"Not that we lord it over your faith; we work with you for your joy, for you stand firm in your faith."*

First, I want to thank the Rector for the privilege of preaching on this Sunday which comes closest to the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my ordination to the priesthood on this Tuesday, Shrove Tuesday, by the way.

I am astonished that a quarter of a century has passed since that Lenten Emberide Saturday when in the aftermath of a great blizzard Bishop Lyman Ogilby of Pennsylvania put hands on my head at All Saints' Church, Wynnewood, to make me a priest.

Now then, those of you who know me certainly can imagine that I am sore tempted to take a grand trip down Memory Lane. But will you indulge me in a little detour, instead?

The whole business of me being ordained has to do first with the blessings of God's grace, mercy and patience in my life. Those blessings have been many and wholly undeserved and I cannot be grateful enough for them.

Next, however, my priesthood has to do with growing up in a family where the Faith of Jesus Christ was taken for granted. Going to church was no different from breathing; which is to say, it wasn't jammed down our throats, it was a natural thing to do. While we were Episcopalians, our favorite brand of it, Low Church, was flavored with the quietism of an ample Quaker ancestry and some hearty Lutheranism. (Alas, some of you would say those things were a hindrance.) In addition, my parents certainly showed my sister and me the Faith, the best way, by example. I will always be in their debt for that, amongst so many other things.

Then of course there were three very able Godparents who took their promises seriously; they made sure I learnt the Creed, the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments. There were some Sunday school teachers whom I will never forget and whose ability with the flannel graph and, believe it or not, excitement about what the collects should mean in the everyday life of a twelve year old, were remarkable.

My liturgical feet got wet when I became an acolyte. And somehow I eventually ended up as the Head Acolyte of a cadre of 45 boys. (Weren't the late 1950's and early '60's an astonishing time in ECUSA?) Then came the steady and relentless prodding of my college chaplain about going to visit the Virginia Seminary "just to see what it was like", to which I just as steadfastly responded, "Why

ever would I want to do that?" God finally put me in the way of two wonderful bishops, Robert Hall and Lyman Ogilby, who ordained me deacon and priest, respectively. They never failed to encourage, instruct and support me. The detour is at an end, but, in addition, to many others whom I won't name though perhaps I owe them even more, I must say that without one other group of witnesses, that is, all of you and the dear, dear folks at All Saints' Church, Wynnewood, the only other parish in which I've served, my priesthood would not have amounted to much. They and you have loved, supported and taught me so much about the saving mercies of our Lord Jesus Christ and how we're meant to share and enjoy them. I owe each of you much.

But the Rector asked me to talk about what the priesthood is; so on to the text I've chosen from Saint Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians, which, by the way, you heard in last week's epistle lesson, "Not that we lord it over your faith; we work with you for your *joy*, for you stand firm in your faith."

This is a line which St Paul wrote to the fledgling parish he had established in Corinth and which because of false teaching was calling into question his integrity, his authority over them and nurture of them. He was desperate to have them understand the relationship that they were supposed to have with him as their leader and pastor. He was also very concerned to avoid the danger that faces each priest; that is, the possibility of believing that our job is to force others to think as we do! He was determined that the community of faith grasp hold of what is unique about the call of the pastor and priest.

Yet, this text is also a line quoted in a booklet about priesthood which I've had since my college chaplain directed me to it 35 years ago. What grabbed me about it then and what it still holds before me is that at the center of the Christian life is joy and that the priest is meant to be "a helper in joy." I believe that Paul wanted each of us to know that the special ingredient for priesthood is, in fact, joy. Am I saying that the priest is merely instigates delight, or bliss, or gaiety, or pleasure, as the dictionary usually defines joy? No. Am I forgetting definitions of priesthood such as are found in the Offices of Instruction in the Book of Common Prayer, "to preach the Word of God, to baptize, to celebrate the Holy Communion, to pronounce absolution and blessing in God's name?" No, these are crucial to priesthood.

The phrase from II Corinthians is like a flash off of the flint of Saint Paul's spirit which reveals his view of his place and role as a Christian leader and thus, that of any Christian minister. The joy with which the priest helps the community of faith and which he is called to show to the whole community of which he is a part, is something far more potent, dynamic and life-changing than most of us may suspect. It is the point Jesus made when He told the disciples, "These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full." Jesus was emphasizing that through joy He has a relationship with believers. Blessedly that relationship delivers us from an existence that can be barren, empty, lonely, meaningless and sad. That relationship likewise gets us through such times of crisis as confront now. For me, helping with that kind of joy is what I've tried to be about "lo these many years!"

Now, this word, joy, shows up 51 times in the New Testament. Its various forms show up even more times. In the New Testament, as more than one commentator tells us, such joy is that "state of unclouded communion with God and fellowship with each other in which our overflowing and constant experience will be one of unspeakable and full glory." Did you notice? Communion, fellowship, full glory define joy! It is, in other words, a condition of mind and heart in which our powers are so absorbed in some creative task that we are free from self-concern. To be plain, Jesus' kind of joy is nothing less than the basis of true freedom.

With this kind of joy the priest has the call and the pleasure of linking the common life of the Church to the Gospel of divine forgiveness upon which the common life depends. This, after all, is why we say at the end of the rite of reconciliation, when the penitent has received absolution, "Now there is rejoicing in heaven; for you were lost, and are found; you were dead, and are now alive in

Christ Jesus our Lord.” It is this aspect of joy with which we priests are meant to help the faithful. Was it is this aspect of joy which prompted Archbishop Michael Ramsey to observe that what sets the priest apart from the very valuable helping professions with which God has likewise blessed us, is that “Many kinds of professions bring relief to the problems of everyday life, but all too often a whole dimension is missing- that of sin and forgiveness.” Bishop Michael’s observation also opens us to the fact that joy doesn’t depend on the circumstances or happiness. Happiness depends on happenings, but God’s joy is planted in our hearts and overrides all things even the most troublesome aspects of life.

In a wonderful way, today’s Gospel, the story of the Transfiguration of Jesus Christ, makes very plain the joy with which I believe that I am called to help you and with which we all can be agents of change and vessels of new life in a confused and upset world. We can be stunned, truly dazzled, perhaps even confused if we look straight into the light of Christ such as was seen on that mountain all of those years ago. But if we remember, first, that that light makes all things known which can make all things bearable; then, second, together we can turn and share that life-changing news while Christ’s light illumines the way we should go and the restored life he wants us to enjoy. I thank God for that exciting duty and call and that I can do it with all of you.