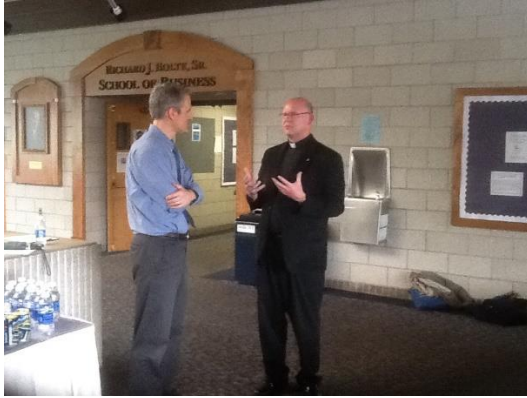




The weekend of May 11-12 might go down as one of the busiest weekends that I have had in years. To begin the weekend, the Mount celebrated its Baccalaureate Mass on Friday evening. It was a wonderful opportunity to thank God for all God’s blessings over the last number of years for our graduates, as well as to ask God’s continued blessings as our Mount graduates move into the world embodying the mission of Mount St. Mary’s University: “to graduate men and women who cultivate a mature spiritual life, who live by high intellectual and moral standards, who respect the dignity of other persons, who see and seek to resolve the problems facing humanity, and who commit themselves to live as responsible citizens.” The following day, we celebrated Commencement in a jam-packed arena that brought together students, parents, grandparents, siblings, cousins, faculty, administrators, staff, and friends.





After graduation, I traveled to St. Bernadette Parish in Severn to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation at 4:30, and to preside and preach at 4 Eucharists, including a First Communion.



After the last Eucharist I made my way home in order to grade 140 tests! I had 30 students in a class on “Sacraments” and 110 students in four sections of another class called “Belief in Today’s World.” When I would tell people that I had all these tests to grade by Tuesday, most people responded, “Oh, just give them all A’s!” Of course, that is not possible, and like many things that we face in life, I was able to get all the tests graded on time—quickly and fairly!



Mount St. Mary's University in Emmitsburg, Maryland

A few weeks later, I made my way to St. Bernadette's Parish for weekend Mass celebrations on June 1-2. This was not a normal weekend, however. After many years of service to St. Bernadette's Parish, this particular weekend marked my last regular ministry in the parish. My first time serving at St. Bernadette's Parish was on August 14, 1994—almost 25 years ago. The weekend was punctuated with many gracious words of “thank you” on the part of parishioners



Sanctuary of St. Bernadette Parish, Severn, Maryland

and some (many?) tears on my part. With the participation of the entire congregation, I received a special “musical” blessing from the choir at the 12:15 Eucharist and an absolutely incredible luncheon send-off later in the afternoon. I ended each Mass with a Celtic Blessing which a colleague at school, Dr. Sean Lewis, made available to me.

*I wish you not a path devoid of clouds,
Nor a life on a bed of roses.
Nor that you might never need regret,
Nor that you should never feel pain.*

*No, this is not my wish for you. My wish for you is:
That you might be brave in times of trial
When others lay crosses upon your shoulders.
When mountains must be climbed and chasms crossed,
When hope scarce shines through.
That every gift God gave you might grow along with you,
And let you give the gift of joy to all who care for you.*

*That you might always have a friend who is worth that name.
Whom you can trust,
And who helps you in times of sadness,
Who will defy the storms of life by your side.*

*One more wish I have for you:
That in every hour of joy and pain, you feel God close to you.
This is my wish for you and all those who care for you.
This is my hope for you, now and forever.*



I tried my best to get through the blessing, but I was overcome each time I came to the last stanza. It was hard not to think of the marvelous opportunities and blessings that I have had at St. Bernadette's, ministering with and to so many people.



Where did all those 25 years go? Well, they went by as we celebrated countless Sunday Eucharists, the sacrament of Reconciliation on late Saturday afternoons, and the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick on Sunday afternoons. This time was also dotted with other celebrations, including many Baptisms—one of my favorite ministries as a priest—many First Communions, and some First Reconciliations, weddings, confirmations, and funerals. The years were also punctuated with various Lenten series on Scripture and the moral life. Of course, these times also included much fun, culminating in not just acting LIKE a clown, but actually BEING a clown (with Fr. Mike Murphy)! I still don't think I have ever laughed more than on that night. 😊😊😊



But what a sendoff I had in the afternoon on June 2nd! I cannot express enough appreciation for all the well wishes, gifts, cards, notes, and hugs and kisses during this weekend. The reception was fantastic and I appreciate all the hard work that people put into preparing and serving the food and drink. But, most of all, I want to thank the people of St. Bernadette's most deeply for your presence in my life over these past 25 years. You have made a lasting impression on me. One parishioner said to me, "You know, Fr. Jim, your presence will always be felt here because, in a sense, you are leaving a little bit of you here. But, our presence will always be with you because, in a sense, you are taking a little bit of us with you." I will always keep the parishioners of St. Bernadette Parish in my thoughts and prayers.



On August 1, 2019 I will begin my time as rector of our Tanzanian seminarians who have already professed their temporary vows. Fr. Andrzej Duda, C.R. (pictured below) will be leading our novitiate for some of the men who have already lived in our Tanzanian formation house, and perhaps a few other candidates.



I have finished getting all the medical preparations and I have my missionary visa to Tanzania in order. But, this will be an adventure and I know that I can count on your thoughts and prayers.





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