

FEARS AND DREAMS

In the current issue of *Church* (a quarterly periodical on pastoral and parish life), there is an article written by a priest who is preparing to celebrate his silver anniversary of ordination. In it, he recounts the day before being ordained, when he and three others (all to be consecrated priests together) were invited to dinner with their bishop, William McManus of Ft. Wayne-South Bend. In the course of the dinner, the bishop asked them, “What are yours dreams, and what are your fears?”

The author commented that he could remember nothing what he said, nor anything said by his comrades, but he did give a beautiful account of what the bishop’s own reply. I wonder what I would have said.

In fact, I wonder if I would have been (or could have been) honest in my responses. Is there anything that requires more vulnerability and transparency than answering those questions?

Perhaps I might have made a “dodger answer”—because I would be afraid that my dreams would be (or seem) too egotistical, or that my fears would reveal me as too weak (again, too egotistical). This is especially true because it is all too easy (though not at all correct) to equate dreams with ambition, & fears with failure.

Would my biggest fear be one of being exposed in any area of ministry as incompetent, or would an even bigger fear be one of being *thought of as* incompetent? Would I be content to be a failure so long as no one knew it? Would my dream be one of being an effective minister of Jesus Christ, or would I rather dream of being recognized that way (especially by the “higher-ups” in the Church)? These can be tempting (because of my ego), but I’m glad they’re not my bottom line.

In honesty, my “dreams” now are to be a prayerful & faithful pastor at Our Savior, to be an ecumenical bridge for the Archdiocese, and by my writing and speaking to be able to lead people to Jesus Christ. My fears are my failure in relationships in such a way that it keeps others from Christ, or leads them away from Him. I’m too aware that my fears have been realized in the past—not always the distant past, either. But I keep working on the dreams. Could I have said this just before I was ordained? Probably not. But “that was then, and this is now.”

How would you have answered Bishop McManus, 25 years ago, or today?