

## **Being a widower priest isn't bad!**

After reading my column, "Golden Jubilee Thoughts," Dr. Pat emailed me to congratulate and to pass on some thoughts. Dr. Pat, her husband, Dr. Thomas and large Catholic family moved to Hattiesburg several years ago where Dr. Thomas was to practice medicine until his untimely death some years later. Pat pursued a doctorate degree in psychology. Now, widowed, and her children moved on to their own careers, Pat had time to do some musing and create her own blog.

Her email read, "Love, love loved your GPC column Golden Jubilee thoughts...The column is so beautifully written and while so deeply personal, yet universal. I can only think of you as a Widower now. Your active ministry with your Bride, the Church, has become perhaps less visible, less demanding in service but never less valuable, never less relevant. God called. You answered. Your Bride was/is unfaithful but like Hosea you have persisted. Thank you. Thank you so very, very much.

You blessed us at St. Thomas, Hattiesburg, and I believe you continue to bless us through your prayers at the altar now. Thank you so much."

I have been called many things as a priest. Being called a "Widower" in my retirement is an interesting observation. But I like it. It is true. There is no longer a regular parish or regular parishioners.

There are no longer opportunities to see the same faces weekend after weekend, and, to be able to say to someone that you missed at church; "We missed you last weekend," There are no longer opportunities

to watch children grow up, graduate and marry within a few short years.

Instead, there are opportunities to still celebrate weekends with different but unattached communities to allow more permanent priests to take a vacation; while, at the same time, being able to get in one's car and come home without worrying about mundane things like the collection or locking the church.

Being able to say "yes" or "no" to a possible invitation or commitment is freeing and responsible. No need to worry about hospital calls or midnight call or unanswerable scan calls. After all, being a widower priest isn't bad.

A priest friend that I grew up with and went to the same schools and both ended up in Mississippi – he in Jackson diocese and yours truly in Biloxi; just retired. Talking to his brother and sister-in-law, they expressed a concern for his retirement now that he will return to Jackson, not to look forward to meeting his parishioners again after his vacation, but to return there as a retired priest with no parish and no parishioners.

I had tried, during the past few summers, to share with him some insights and wisdom I had gleaned from my own experience. Yet, he has to embrace the joys and sorrows of widowhood as well and realize it isn't all bad.

He will discover that much of his conversations will be couched in the past tense, rather in a more active present tense. There will be a period of mourning, or letting go of the predictable or comfortable for the unchartered.

On occasion, we may meet a couple who have been married a long time that they become so tuned into each other that they can express each other's unspoken thoughts or finish each other's sentences. When one part of the relationship dies, sometimes, the loss can be so painful that the living person wishes to die too and be reconnected with their soul friend in heaven.

Like all widowhood experiences, there is a time for letting go, as the Book of Ecclesiastes reminds us The stable waters of time, triumphs and testifying have moved on and new bridges must be crossed over unknown, but grace-filled waters and opportunities. He, too, will make that journey, armed with wisdom received, insights gained over the years and the assuring hand of the Creator to guide him into his new found love, - Widowhood.

I just emailed Dr. Pat to tell her that I really appreciate my new title – Widower. It isn't bad! It is good! In fact, I love it! I am no longer a retired priest, I am a Widower priest