



FATHER JAMES HEFT

Celebrating 50 years Priestly Ordination

In July of 1961, I left Cleveland on a train destined for Marcy, New York. I thought I wanted to become a Marianist brother and teach high school. Why? Because I saw Marianist brothers who taught me at St. Joseph's High School. I really admired them and wanted to be like them, more than becoming a medical doctor or a lawyer. It now baffles me why I, and so many others at that time, were willing to make such bold decisions. It also saddens me why so many young people today have such difficulty not just choosing religious life, but even remaining active in the Church. The prophet Bob Dylan was right, "the times are a changin'."

In this still unfolding 60 years of cultural and religious revolution, I remain committed and hopeful. I am neither an optimist nor a pessimist. Optimists and pessimists already know the outcome: optimists are prone to presumption; pessimists to despair. All Christians should be people of hope. Even though I am hopeful, I must admit that I understand much less now than I once thought I understood on the train to the Novitiate. However, now I do understand and believe that God has been prodigal, blessing me, both as a Marianist and a Catholic, with his mercy and love. The only appropriate response for me is wonder, not bafflement, and gratitude, not sadness. It is

clearer to me now that God, in His mysterious way, is, in John Henry Newman's words, that "kindly light" who leads me on, one step at a time.