

This past weekend I celebrated my 34th Anniversary as a priest. My ordination happened on a Friday evening and on the Sunday morning after, I celebrated my First Mass, which happened to be the birthday of my deceased maternal grandmother who prayed all her life that a grandson would become a priest. She died when I was 5 years old.

In any event, the night before my anniversary, two of my nieces and their families and my sister-in-law treated me to supper. On Saturday, my actual anniversary, I had nothing planned. So it was an unusually quiet anniversary yet not without a gift. Because it was quiet, with no celebratory dinner planned on the day itself, I reflected a lot. Thirty-four years ago on the afternoon of August 12 it rained. I remember because I got all wet while I was in the cemetery visiting my parents' tombs, thanking them for their faith, in spite of all the challenges that were present in our lives. At about the same time on this August 12 afternoon it rained as well, and my quieted mind and heart exploded with grateful memory. Then, during the Saturday evening Mass, while I was cleaning the vessels after Holy Communion, the cantor announced the Song of Thanksgiving: "I Sing the Mighty Power of God." Again, my mind quieted and heart exploded. That was the opening hymn I chose for my First Mass and I was overflowing with gratitude again.

Victor Turner was an anthropologist whose study of ritual opened up Catholic theologians to a greater understanding of the Mass. He defines "festival" as the living out, in an uncommon way, the universal assent to the world. I kept festival on this August 12 in an uncommon way, at least as compared with all other anniversaries in the past, yet I certainly felt content and full of gratitude.

Celebrations don't always have to take shape with crowds and boisterous gatherings. One can celebrate alone, as I did, and be filled with joy. It requires the gift of not having any expectations and accepting the giftedness of the present moment.