



Bishop Mark A. Eckman

Divine Grace Parish – Saturday, August 23, 2025

Interviewed by Bob De Witt

Interview Transcript

Bishop Eckman, welcome to Divine Grace Parish, and thank you for your time. (Thank you, Bob)

1. *You were installed as the 13th Bishop of Pittsburgh just over a month ago, on July 14, at Saint Paul Cathedral. How are you adjusting to your new responsibilities and routine?*

I've been a bishop for three and a half years, so I just really switched from one floor to another. There are less meetings in my position now but there's more events. So I'm going out to parishes and celebrating various Masses and installations of different ministries for people. So it's been pretty good. The adjustment is everybody else getting used to a different style of leadership. But it's going pretty well.

2. *In your installation homily, you asked the faithful for three needs: to keep you in prayer, to be patient as you learn your new role, and to pray for vocations. How are people responding so far?*

They're responding very well. You know, as I said I'm going around to various parishes, and they're mentioning all three of those points. They all are promising prayers for me, which I definitely need, and I can feel those prayers and I appreciate those prayers. And then the patience, I imagine they're being patient, they really have no choice because I am learning new aspects of the job that are a little bit different. And as I said my leadership style is a little different so they have to be patient as we learn together. And the vocation push is something that I believe all the parishes are taking seriously—forming vocations councils and we'll be doing a lot with that in the next several months, so we'll see the fruit of that in a very short time. But the folks have been responding very well. That helps me and gives me a lot of comfort.

3. *In our increasingly secular society, what should we know about the importance of vocations—both lay and religious?*

Well, you know vocation is responding to the voice of the Lord. That's the first thing. Everybody has a call that God is giving them. So to be open to hearing that, and then to do it to the best of your ability. Whether it's a vocation to the priesthood or religious life which we certainly need for people to serve the Church, or if it's people recognizing the importance of a married vocation or a single vocation, those two are very demanding because our modern society is very secular, and this counts very often the sanctity of marriage and how special that relationship is between husband and wife, and how that makes God's presence known in a very unique and special way. So, to emphasize those vocations is very important.

4. *Two priests were ordained in our diocese this past June. Five more are expected to become priests next summer. Are there enough ordinations coming as more senior priests retire?*

Well, like any good accountant, it all depends on how you count. Right now, yes. This past year we didn't have anyone retire, so even having only two priests ordained was a blessing. We only had one retired priest die, which also was a blessing. So we're stable right at this moment. But should priests age out, or should the priest die, especially if it's an active priest in ministry who dies, it is difficult to fill those spots. So five (new priests) next year would certainly be a blessing and there are six the year after that so that, too, will be a very prosperous year. We have 33 men total in the seminary right now, and they're all fine men. Eleven are at Saint Paul Seminary in various stages of discipleship, and the rest of them are at either Saint Vincent Seminary in Latrobe, Saint Mary's in Baltimore or Theological College in Washington, DC. They work in the parishes in the summer, and they are deacons in the parishes when they are not in school. So they're getting a lot of training in the parish so that they're able to embrace that ministry. But right now, we're balanced, but it wouldn't take much to throw that off.

5. *You said you want to visit all the parishes in the diocese- what do you hope to learn?*

My episcopal motto is, "To serve in faith and charity." So that's the question I'm bringing to the parishes—how does your parish practice the spiritual and corporal works? And whatever you're doing, how can we make it stronger, and if you're not doing anything or any of it works, how can we establish that perhaps in your parish or your parish working with neighboring parishes. Every parish doesn't have to do every single thing—they can work together. We need to address the needs of the poor and the less fortunate, and we need to make sure that we're being respectful of all human life, no matter where, who or what they need. So it's a lot of work but I'd like to be able to coordinate the whole diocese so that we can make sure that we're addressing everybody's needs.

6. *How can members of Divine Grace Parish grow closer to Jesus, and help bring others to Him?*

What I always tell folks is the most important thing that we can do as a Christian people is to pray. Our prayer life helps us to establish a relationship with the Lord. It helps us to understand what He wants us to do, and also help to do that. A lot of people just think of prayer being the formal prayers that we learned when we were younger—the Our Father, the Hail Mary, the Glory Be, which are all very important, especially when you put them together to pray the Rosary or other devotions. But the first step really in establishing a good prayer life would be similar to when you establish a friendship. When you have a new friend you get to learn what they like, what they dislike, what you have in common, and you enjoy spending time and company with that person. And that's the same with the Lord. When we pray, we understand what He wants us to do. We understand what He likes in what we're doing, in our behavior and in our attitude, and we also come to understand what is not acceptable and how He wants us to change and to grow in His love. And then we're able to accomplish whatever it is that He's asking us to do by being faithful to the ministry. For any parishioner, it's the prayer life that's essential, and everything else will sprout from that.

Bishop, thank you for your time.

Sure, it's my pleasure, and I'm looking forward to coming back.