Monsignor Gregory Gier

Rector Emeritus of Holy Family Cathedral

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Announcer: Monsignor Greg Gier was 17 years old and enjoying his high school days when the thought came to him, “There must be more to life than this, there must be, and that’s when I decided to see if, in fact, I was being called to be a priest.”

Monsignor Gier was ordained on May 27th, 1967, and was the pastor at Christ the King Church in Tulsa for 13 years. He also served churches in Oklahoma City, Bartlesville, Dewey, Muskogee, and Ponca City.

He led or taught at Bishop Kelly and Bishop McGuiness High Schools, Marquette, and the Holy Family Cathedral School.

Monsignor Gier was rector for 17 years for Holy Family Cathedral in Tulsa. He was on the board of directors for Catholic Charities of Tulsa and was vocational director for the Diocese of Tulsa.

The 50th anniversary of Monsignor Gier’s ordination was observed in 2017.

Listen to Monsignor Gier as he talks about his favorite people of the Bible, the challenges of the church, and Pope Leo on the podcast and website VoicesOfOklahoma.com.

Chapter 2 – 10:20
More to Life

John Erling (JE): My name is John Erling. And today's date is July 30, 2025. So would you state your full name, please.

Monsignor Gregory Gier (GG): Monsignor Gregory Arthur Gier.

JE: And your date of birth?

GG: July 20th, 1941.

JE: Makes your present age?

GG: 84.

JE: Just recently having celebrated a birthday. Gier, is there any story to the name Gier?

GG: Not particularly. My great-grandmother announced to her family in Germany after the Franco-Prussian War that he had gotten her father, he had gotten her uncles, he had gotten her husband and all her brothers, and he was not going to get her five sons. And she put those five boys on a ship and came to America

JE: And "he" meaning...?

GG: The Kaiser. And the Gier—my family traces its roots back to the River Gier in Alsace-Lorraine.

JE: OK, and your title Monsignor. What does Monsignor mean as opposed to being a priest and how are you given that title?

GG: Well, the word Monsignor translates into English as "my lord." And it is an old, old title in the Roman Catholic Church. If you go back far enough, the heads of the Papal States were Monsignors, and it was a title that was given to someone who ruled over the Papal States.

As it has come down, Monsignor is simply an honorary title that is conferred upon a priest who has been recommended, and the title is conferred by the Holy Father personally onto a priest who has been recommended—most normally by his bishop for an honor to receive this honor.

In our diocese, Bishop Slattery had the vicar general of the diocese, who was like the second in command, like the vice president of the diocese. He was made a Monsignor because he stood in the stead of the bishop. The rector of the cathedral was made a Monsignor because the rector is the real pastor of the cathedral—the bishop. And so the rector is one who stands in his place.

Bishop Slattery thought that those two men should be made Monsignors, and that's when we had our first two Monsignors, when Monsignor Dennis Culan Dorney and Monsignor James Halpine were made Monsignors. Dennis Dorney was the vicar general, James Halpine was the rector of the cathedral. Then ten years later he made four more Monsignors—the new rector of the cathedral, the new vicar general, the head of the permanent deaconate program in the diocese, and then the priest who was the pastor of Christ the King, who had run a big synod thing that we did in the research of the diocese. And that man is now the bishop of Reno, Nevada.

JE: You became Monsignor by which Pope?

GG: John Paul II.

JE: And where did that take place?

GG: It took place at a little ceremony in Holy Family Cathedral when our bishop presented me with the parchment that said that I'd been made a Monsignor by the Pope. My parchment is signed by John Paul II. It's genuine parchment because it comes from Rome.

JE: And it's probably behind glass.

GG: At the present time it is. It's hanging in my office at Holy Family, as a matter of fact, right next to my ordination statement and my academic degrees.

JE: We're recording this interview on the facilities of Voices of Oklahoma. Where were you born?

GG: I was born in Wichita, Kansas, Saint Francis Hospital.

JE: Your mother's name, maiden name, where she was born.

GG: My mother—her name was Carney. And she was a little Irish girl and they lived in the north end of Wichita, Kansas, which was the Irish section of Wichita, Kansas at that time. She even was raised in Saint Patrick's Parish in Wichita. When I was born, my father and mother lived in my grandmother's house with my grandmother. Well, my grandmother died three months before I was born, but that's where they lived.

JE: What was her personality like?

GG: Well, she would have been a little more the introvert than my father. My father was an automobile salesman, and they used to joke that my father could sell ice boxes to Eskimos. He worked in the automobile business his whole life. In fact, in 1955 my father had worked for Studebaker Corporation for 35 years.

JE: And his name?

GG: Clarence Aloysius Gier.

JE: And then where was he born and grew up?

GG: Chillicothe, Missouri, which is where my grandmother took the boys. So his father was one of the five boys that came from Germany.

JE: So he had a salesman's personality.

GG: Oh Lord, yes, and I inherited an awful lot of his personality, much more so than my mother. My mother's very Irish and melancholy, and all of that kind of Irish personality thing. She had a great sense of humor, and my father had a phenomenal sense of humor, but my mother was much more the quiet person.

JE: So then your mother was Irish and your father was German.

GG: Which was a very common mix in the Catholic Church in the early 1900s. Because there were a lot of Irish immigrants and a lot of German immigrants, and they were both Catholics and they could come together on religious principles and norms and values. They say historically in the United States, some of the most successful and long-term marriages were between the Irish and the Germans, especially if the Irish was a woman and the German was the man.

JE: What difference does that make?

GG: I imagine who thought they should be in charge. And my mother was very Irish in the sense that my father always thought he was in charge.

JE: OK, let's talk about your education. Where did you first go to school? Elementary?

GG: My very first and only experience in a public school was at Gatewood Grade School in Oklahoma City. I went there to kindergarten because the

Catholic school didn't have a kindergarten. Then from 1st through 8th grade I went to Rosary School in Oklahoma City, which is the Catholic grade school connected to Saint Francis of Assisi Parish. From there I went to what was then called Central Catholic High, and during my senior year they changed the name of Central Catholic High to McGuinness High School. So I graduated from McGuinness High School in Oklahoma City.

JE: In what year?

GG: 1959.

JE: In high school, did you participate in any organizations or beyond your academic work?

GG: I would say the most active and enthusiastic thing I did was go to dances. I was also involved in the speech programs and the theater thing and all that. I was not an athlete. I did not play basketball or baseball or I wasn't the star of the football team or any of that stuff. I was just kind of the easygoing kid that made everybody comfortable. So I have found out from my classmates afterwards.

JE: Were you funny?

GG: Oh yes.

JE: So that got you into all sorts of stuff.

GG: Right. Also, because my father was in the automobile business, when I was 16, I got a car, so that made me very popular.

JE: Maybe this is too early to ask that question, but you did go to seminary. We'll talk about that. When did you first feel called to the priesthood?

GG: When I was 7 years old.

JE: OK.

GG: Very clear. The year I made my first communion—which in the Catholic Church in those days you made your first communion in the 2nd grade when you were 7 years old. My cousin was ordained a priest that same summer. His ordination first mass was one Sunday, and the next Sunday was my first communion. So the connection of my life and his life were very close. His mother and my mother were sisters, and we were very close

to them and they were very close to us, even though they lived in Wichita and we lived in Oklahoma City.

It was a call that I was aware of. Most everything was kind of going fine, and that's what I was probably going to do—go to the seminary. Then I was in the 7th grade and suddenly discovered that the person next to me was a whole lot more interesting than the guy that sits over here. The girl that sits over here was much more interesting. And so I kind of spent most of my 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th, 12th grades having a good time. I danced, I dated, I did everything that you do.

At the end of my senior year, or actually in the summer of that junior year, I had decided that I really needed to find out if I was called to the priesthood. It was pretty much in the summer between my junior and senior year in high school that I decided to apply to the seminary.

JE: What brought you to that decision then?

GG: Well, I said my father was in the automobile business, and at that time he ran a Chrysler Imperial Plymouth agency in Oklahoma City. I loved convertibles, and my father would bring a used car home every night—a convertible from the used car lot—that I could drive all over town. In those days the Shriners in Oklahoma City instead of having horses had white Imperial convertibles that did all the things the horses used to do. Every two or three years suddenly we had 20 white Imperial convertibles on the used car lot. So I drove that a lot, had a lot of fun.

I can remember one night when all that was finished, I took my girlfriend to the door and then I got in the car. As I was driving home, I can remember saying to myself—it's very clear, I was 17 years old—"There has to be more to life than this. There has to be." And that's when I decided I was going to try out and see if in fact I was being called to be a priest.

Chapter 3 – 8:50
Doubting the Call

John Erling (JE): So then you went to seminary.

Monsignor Gregory Gier (GG): Yes, right. As soon as I graduated. An interesting thing about that—when I graduated from Bishop McGuinness High School I was not eligible to go to the seminary because I had one year of Latin and two years of Spanish, and you had to have two years of high school Latin to get into the seminary. So that summer I went to Conception Abbey Seminary for eight weeks and I took two years of Latin so that I was eligible to go to the seminary in September.

JE: Wow. And what seminary?

GG: I went to Saint Thomas Seminary College in Denver, Colorado. It was run by the Vincentian Fathers at that time.

JE: Because you liked Colorado?

GG: No, because that's where the bishop assigned me.

JE: Oh, I see.

GG: We were assigned to the seminary by the bishop of the diocese. When I entered the seminary, there were probably ten or fifteen of us, and at that time our diocese did not have its own major seminary. We had just opened the seminary in Oklahoma City for high school, but we didn't have a college or theologate, so you went to wherever there was an opening. I had seven members of my high school class who went to the seminary.

JE: Did you ever doubt your call in that first seminary experience?

GG: I was totally at ease and very comfortable and had no major problems. Until my deacon year, interestingly enough. My deacon year would be the 4th year of theology—so four years of college and then four years of theology. The end of the 3rd year of theology, you're ordained a deacon. And then at the end of the 4th year of theology, you're ordained a priest.

The first half of that 4th year of theology was just awful. That's when I had all the questions and all the wonders and all the, "Oh my goodness, should

I have done this?" kind of thing. I went through that for about six months, and then woke up one morning and it was all over and I was fine. And I've been glad all my life that I had that six months of distress and wonder, because I had to ask myself a lot of questions during that time.

JE: Did you make that known to teachers?

GG: To my spiritual director, yeah.

JE: And he just let you grapple with that?

GG: He just kind of walked me through it, you know, and he kept saying, "This is just normal. Don't worry about it. It's kind of common."

JE: So then, when you think back on those six months, as you went on later, you knew, "I'm supposed to be where I am."

GG: Oh yeah. I was very comfortable with the decision I had made, and it was kind of like, "Let it come on, I'm ready for it." It was really a very wonderful grace from God that I needed, because I had gone through a little too easily, I think, for the first seven years. It was all just too easy. The biggest angst I had about any of it was whether or not I was ever going to understand epistemology, the philosophy course.

JE: So the academics came very easy for you?

GG: No, not particularly. I would be a B student, not an A student. I just worked from what I learned.

JE: So you graduate then from Saint Thomas in what year?

GG: I graduated from Saint Thomas Seminary College in 1963. I was ordained a priest from Saint Thomas Seminary in 1967, and then the next year I received my master's in arts degree from them. I also went, in the summers of theology—the four years that I was in theology—all four of those summers I went to Saint Louis University and got a master's degree in education.

JE: Well I read over your background here. You were really busy in the 60s, weren't you?

GG: Yes.

JE: Because when you were ordained in Christ the King Church, Oklahoma City in 1967.

GG: Yeah, that was my home parish in Oklahoma City. Bishop Reed ordained men in their home parishes rather than in the cathedral, unless it was your home parish.

JE: Then you became associate pastor of Saint Mary's Church in Ponca City.

GG: That's right.

JE: And that was for a short period of time.

GG: Yes. I was ordained and assigned there the very first week in June. The pastor died in August, and then he was replaced in October. When he was replaced in October, I was transferred from there to Saint Pat's in Oklahoma City.

JE: And there you stayed a few years, didn't you? How long were you there?

GG: I was there about four years. During that four years I had to spend one semester on campus at Saint Louis U to finish my degree work. So one of the years, from September to January, I spent at Saint Louis U.

JE: So this being associate pastor was your first position as pastor, wasn't it?

GG: As an assistant pastor, yeah. In that case Monsignor Canally was the pastor, and then Father Dale Dirk Schneider and myself were the two assistants.

JE: And you were learning about yourself too, some of your strengths and weaknesses.

GG: Probably you learn a lot about yourself as an assistant pastor. You sure do. It's a great time to learn what not to do and what to do.

JE: And what did you discover maybe your strength was?

GG: One of my strongest strengths I think is preaching, and being involved with and interacting with the people, and helping to create a sense of community and belonging and well-being for the community.

I had an associate pastor at Christ the King for 13 years who was an older priest. Every now and then, see, I taught at Kelly for five years, and every

now and then on Sunday morning after a homily, I would come out and Father McCarthy would come up to me and he would say, “Well, the teacher really came out in you today.” So I couldn’t get away from that teaching aspect of my life.

JE: Then religion instructor at Bishop McGuinness High School, Oklahoma City for two years.

GG: For one year. At that time there were like three priests teaching at McGuinness, one teaching at Mount Saint Mary’s, and nobody full time at Kelly. All those high schools were the bishop’s responsibility, so they decided they wanted to put men with degrees as the head of the religion departments of those schools.

I was transferred—I still lived at Saint Pat’s and was still an assistant at Saint Patrick’s—while I taught at McGuinness. Then at the end of that year I was transferred to become the chaplain and religion teacher at Bishop Kelly. The first year I lived at Holy Family, and six months of that year—six of the most delightful months of my whole priesthood—I was temporary administrator of Saint Augustine’s Parish here in North Tulsa. Then I went back to Holy Family, and then for four of those years I lived at Christ the King. So I was kind of like an assistant at Christ the King and teacher at Kelly.

JE: At Bishop Kelly then you were a counselor?

GG: Yes, and I taught religion classes and had hours for counseling both. I would teach 1st and 2nd period and then be free the rest of the day to do counseling.

JE: Counseling high school students. Did they—

GG: It’s a very interesting experience.

JE: Did they willingly come to you, or were they sent to you?

GG: Both. Oftentimes they would just suddenly end up standing at my door saying, “Can I talk to you?” And sometimes sister or brother walked them to my door and said, “You talk to this person.” Also just kind of wandering the halls before and after school, being available, football games, stuff like that.

JE: And you were available.

GG: Oh yes, very much.

JE: As you were there five years doing that, you learned a lot about students. You probably learned a lot about their family life as well.

GG: I know a whole lot more about their parents than their parents would like me to know.

JE: And your lips are sealed.

GG: In most cases, yes, because I was told most of that in confidence.

JE: Were any of these children told not to come back?

GG: Well, luckily I had nothing to do with that. That was all up to Brother Bernadine. Brother Bernadine was very much in charge of the school, no question about that. He had been in charge of the school almost since the day it opened. He was a legend in himself.

Chapter 4 – 11:30
Holy Family Cathedral

John Erling (JE): So and then you were a rector at Holy Family Cathedral 1997 to 2014. So that's your longest stay, isn't it, at that point.

Monsignor Gregory Gier (GG): Yes. The previous one was the 15 years that I was at Christ the King.

JE: All right, so what was your role then as rector?

GG: Virtually I was the pastor. I ran the place, hired and fired the staff. I collected the money for needed things. The bishop was technically the pastor, but I did all the running of it. I think the easiest way to put it is I was the pastor of the parish, but he called me rector because canonically in the Roman Catholic Church, the bishop is the pastor.

JE: Did you preach then too?

GG: Oh yeah. Preached, heard confessions, did weddings, funerals, did counseling, hired and fired staff.

JE: Holy Family is considered the mother church of the diocese and is the seat of the bishops.

GG: That's correct, yes. And when you say mother church, literally, it was the only church in Tulsa until 1918. It was literally the mother church. So Christ the King was founded off of it. Saint Francis was founded off of it. All of them were founded off of Holy Family, so it literally is the mother church.

JE: So then I believe in 1921, the race massacre, the church played a role in that.

GG: Yes. The basement of the church, they made like a triage place. That's where the wounded could come. And the sisters in the school ministered to them because the sisters in the hospital couldn't get to Holy Family because of the race riot. But the sisters that ran the school, who lived right next door in the school building, just came. It's my understanding that in the city of Tulsa during the race riot, the only two white churches that were open and available to minister to the black community were First Presbyterian and Holy Family Cathedral. I don't know where the First Presbyterian Church was then, because it's not the present building because that wasn't built until the 20s, but our building was built in 1914.

JE: That's a nice thought, isn't it, that the church was able to be open to them. Did you ever want to be a bishop?

GG: No. I had a very good friend who said, oh, we'd love to be bishops. We want to be bishop, and it'd be wonderful until after the ceremony. In other words, what's the real thing that—no, I really never wanted to be a bishop. No.

JE: Why is that?

GG: Because I found my satisfaction, my happiness, my joy was working with the families, doing marriage preparation, walking with the family to the cemetery, being there for the baptisms, and really interacting with the life of the parish. The bishop is removed from that in a very real way. He kind of has the priests as his parish, if you want to call it, but it's not this. Even if you do a baptism, you're not doing a baptism of maybe the two kids you married. It's just a whole different intimacy. One of the reasons that I knew

I wanted to be a priest was there were two big loves in my life. I had a tremendous love for God as a child. That stayed with me all through high school. And I love people. One of the things, I looked at those two things in my life and I said, well, where is that going to come together any more powerfully than in ministry, which was one of my impetus for going to the seminary, being a priest. And the priest in the parish has a contact and an interaction with the people that's totally different than the bishop's, totally different.

JE: Did it ever get wearing on you that people were seeking you out a lot?

GG: Maybe. One of the things that's very important to that is, and I think probably because I had studies in counseling and guidance and so forth at Saint Louis U, that's what my degree was in, because of that I knew that the most important thing I can do for my ministry is to get away from it. And I was very diligent about taking my day off and going on vacation and getting away from it all.

JE: Well, that was smart, wasn't it?

GG: Oh, it was a blessing to know that, yeah. And Monsignor Alpine was very key to that, because Monsignor Alpine, when he was a younger pastor, was very involved in establishing in the church in Oklahoma that the priest has Monday off. On Monday off he wouldn't even let us, it was against his rules to even have Mass on Monday because fathers should be off and free. What we did at Holy Family, since there were three of us, we had one Mass at noon on Monday. We didn't have our 7 o'clock Mass in the morning and we didn't have our 5 o'clock Mass in the evening. So one of us stayed and said the Mass.

JE: Monsignor Alpine, tell me about him.

GG: Monsignor Alpine was— I met Monsignor Alpine when I was a junior in high school. He was the associate pastor of one of the parishes in Oklahoma City, Christ the King actually, and he was very active with all the high school kids and all that. His parish had a great youth group and he was the priest that ran it. So I met him when I was 16 and he was 32 or something, right after he was ordained. I had known him from that time then. He was always very nice to me as a young priest, and was always very kind and solicitous.

Then when I was made pastor at Immaculate Conception, which was the parish that used to be up at the 900 block north on Osage Drive, just off of Denver, the original Immaculate Conception was Catholic Charities, and they had moved over to the Osage Drive. Monsignor Alpine is a native Tulsan. When he was a small child, his family sold their home to Boston Avenue Methodist Church, and they built Boston Avenue Methodist Church in what was his backyard. That's where he was, like, born a little bitty kid. Then they moved up north, I think out on North Cheyenne. So that put them in the Immaculate Conception parish. That's where he was raised. He would have gone probably to Immaculate Conception grade school. I'm not sure about that, but at the end of that day in the 8th grade, he would have gone to Holy Family Cathedral School because Holy Family had a 12-year school at that time, Catholic grade school and high school. And his mother says, young man, you are not going to Holy Family, you're going to Central. You have a musical ability and gift and you're not going to go, so you go to Central because of the music. In the 6th, 7th, and 8th grade, he was the organist for the church masses on Sunday morning at Immaculate Conception, and his mother was a musician and so was he. So she made sure he went to Central.

JE: Central and where?

GG: Downtown Tulsa. And his associate pastor was very involved in his life at that time, and there was suggestion that he would go to the seminary. So he went immediately from Central High School to the seminary and was ordained.

So when I was made pastor of Immaculate, he was made pastor of Holy Family Cathedral. He was here at Holy Family and I was just the next parish up, and all of his family was still in Immaculate Conception Parish. All the Kremmens, all those people were there. His sister was still there. So I got to know his family, and his family liked me as pastor, and that just made me that much better in Halpine's eyes and all that.

So we just remained— I'm not going to call, but we were friends. It was a different relationship. It was an older priest mentoring a younger priest who cared about him, and we had a great mutual respect for each other. But we didn't go to dinner together and we didn't go out to the movies together. We didn't do that kind of thing, but we both held each other— I

held Monsignor Alpine in great esteem from my childhood days, and I never felt that he didn't hold me in equal esteem. There was a very mutual respect between us.

So when the bishop asked me to be the rector of the cathedral, that meant Monsignor Alpine was retiring. The big question was, well, what happens to Alpine? And the bishop said, well, you're the rector, it's your house, so you decide. So I went to Alpine and I said, "Please stay. Don't move out. You've lived here 21 years as the rector of this cathedral, and any help you would give me would be greatly appreciated, and I think we can work together, but let's at least try," and we did that for 13 years.

JE: Man, how fortunate you were.

GG: Oh, yeah.

JE: So would he—

GG: He said Mass. He heard confessions. He did all sorts of things.

JE: Well, I would ask you the question, who were the mentors in your life? Would he be the main one?

GG: He's very much one of them, yes.

JE: Do you have others?

GG: My cousin, the priest in Kansas, was very much influential in my life as a priest. And then Father Dan Cronin, who was my pastor at Christ the King most of the years that I taught at Kelly. He was a foreign-born Irish priest who was at Christ the King, and we lived together for four years, and we got along very, very well. He was very extraordinary. I thought the world of him.

And then the other people that were crucial to me were priest friends, my contemporaries who— we traveled together, we spent the days off together, we went to Mexico together, we went to Italy together, we went to Germany together, we traveled a lot, and we were each other's sanity points. The time off was when we— and we had a good time. There were two priests who were brothers who were 14 years apart from my parish in Oklahoma City, and I was in the middle between them. One was four years

younger and one was three years older than I was, and I always called myself the middle child in that family. The older one especially was very solicitous and very influential in decisions that I made about assignments I might take and stuff, and he was the chancellor of the diocese of Oklahoma City.

JE: But I'm quite certain you've been a mentor to several yourself.

GG: A few, yes. I've had the great privilege of having associate pastors, and in all my cases, practically, my associate pastor, it was their first assignment after ordination. I've had some great young men work with me in that, and still to this day I get calls, "What should I do about this?" Or, as one of my associate pastors told me, he says, "You know, my staff has no idea how thankful they should be about you." And I go, "What do you mean?" He says, "Well, many a day I look at them, I go to my office, I close the door, I sit in my chair, and I go, 'What would Gier do?'" Which I thought was kind of nice. That was a great compliment.

Chapter 5 – 12:45
Metropolitan Ministries

John Erling (JE): Did you also make friends with other denominational ministers, pastors?

Monsignor Gregory Gier (GG): Well, only a little bit through the group that Monsignor Alpine went with, because I went to all those luncheons. I would consider Jim Miller a friend. And I would consider Darron Spoo a friend that I met through those two—

JE: And that group was named. It was a Metropolitan Ministries?

GG: They became ultimately Tulsa Metropolitan Ministries. They were never named that, but out of their meetings and out of what they brought together and established, ultimately became Tulsa Metropolitan Ministries. What it was originally, it was really an immensely brave thing. Warren Hulren, pastor of First Baptist. Clarence Knipa, pastor of Grace Lutheran. Bill Wiseman, pastor of First Pres. Monsignor Halpine, pastor of Holy Family. And I cannot remember the name—Biggs, and then Mooson Biggs

from Boston Avenue. And there were two or three pastors in the history of it from First Methodist, but then there was also a man, and I can't remember his name, but he was a pastor of First Christian for 25 years and he died right after, because I remember one of the first things I did as rector of Holy Family Cathedral was to go to his funeral. And he was also—those guys, what they did—

JE: Between Catholics and Protestants and—

GG: Their great moment of strength and courage was they ate lunch together once a month right in the middle of the dining room of the Petroleum Club, right in front of everybody.

JE: And people would say "Ooooo!"

GG: Oh, every one of them got parishioners saying, "What are you doing eating with that Catholic priest?" And some others said to the Catholic priest, "What are you doing eating with that Baptist minister?" And that started the whole thing. Out of those luncheons—and all they did was go to lunch together once a month and talked and got to know each other—and all became very good friends. Some of Monsignor Alpine's closest ministerial friends in the whole history of his life were those guys. He and Bill Weissman and Charles Kanepa. And then when Jim Miller came and took Bill Weissman's place, Jim Miller spoke at Monsignor Halpine's funeral. Then also involved in that was Charles Sherman—

JE: Charles Sherman, exactly, and I've interviewed him.

GG: He would have been involved in all of that. I don't know what he told you about it or if he shared with you about that.

JE: But beyond having lunch, did they do anything else?

GG: First they just kind of had lunch together and were public. They were in front of people and created, shall we say, the buzz that went with that. Then I think the next big thing they did was on the Wednesday night before Thanksgiving. They had a Thanksgiving prayer service in one of their churches and invited all of their people to come. And the norm was it moved around all the churches, and the preacher was whoever had been the newest or assigned, you know. So I preached one year, Jim Miller preached the next year, that kind of thing.

And you preach—because I can remember the year I preached, it was at Boston Avenue, and there I was preaching from the pulpit of Boston Avenue Methodist Church. I just said, "Oh my God," like—

So that was big. Then the next thing they did was—or I don't honestly know the history whether they started having the Thanksgiving things first or this first—they did practical kind of food ministry and housing, and they addressed things that mutual Christians could do together without contradicting their own theologies.

JE: So what were you trying to accomplish by all that?

GG: Interfaith dialogue, conversation, getting over "I hate you because you're who you are even though I don't have any idea who you are." It was to create conversation. And it came out of—much of that came out of Vatican II. Vatican II had a huge section called interfaith dialogue that brought that about. So that kind of came out of that within the Catholic Church—so we should talk to Protestants. There was some point in all of that where the Christian pastors decided they needed to branch out, and that's when they then invited Charles Sherman to come and be part of it.

JE: It's not just Protestants wondering about Catholics, because Protestants wonder about each other. A Baptist will say, oh, you're a Methodist, or you're a Baptist. And so we have that in the Protestants—

GG: I know you do. We were very aware of it from the outside looking in. But it wasn't until the 1990s—a lot of people don't know this—that it wasn't until the 1990s that the Southern Baptist Convention included Catholicism on their Christian list—Catholics, Protestants, and Jews—and we were as separate as the Jews.

JE: My mind is wandering back when President Kennedy was running for office, and you remember that too, and you were in your twenties, and here was this charismatic JFK, but he was a Catholic, and if he was going to be president, the Pope would really be running—

GG: He'd be running the country because he had a prior allegiance to a foreign power.

JE: Right, right—

GG: Which just says you don't know dink about Catholicism. But that's, you know. Yes, we have an allegiance to him, yes, but it has nothing to do with the political running of your country.

JE: But it took a while, and I think President Kennedy—or candidate Kennedy—had to make a special speech --

GG: ... saying that he would observe the law of the country.

JE: And once he did that, then that kind of fell away. But I'm sure there were those who voted against him because he was a Catholic.

GG: Well, I lived in Oklahoma City at that time, and I lived next door to a Presbyterian family who were dyed-in-the-wool Democrats, and they went to their Presbyterian Church one Sunday during all of that and their pastor just told everyone in that church, "If you vote for Kennedy, you are going to hell. There's no doubt about it. You're electing the Pope to be—" all that was—and they said it in their church, and they sat there and they were absolutely incensed by it. So the next Sunday they took their entire family with the biggest Kennedy button you could buy on the left shoulder. They sat in the front pew. And when he started his tirade on Kennedy, they got up and walked out of the church and never walked back in. Well, they then started going to the Unitarian Church.

JE: I think it's good for young people to reflect and realize that's the way it was.

GG: Oh yeah. And see, we lived next door to each other for 15 years at that point and we were very good friends. I mean, my mother and their mother were very good friends. And I remember the sensitivity that was so beautiful, and this is a funny thing to remember about your childhood. In those days, Catholics didn't eat meat on Friday, exclamation point. It wasn't any discussion about it. You just didn't do it.

So one Friday we're all playing and having fun and it's summertime and we just all had lunch at their house and we had leftover fried chicken. I didn't even think it was Friday. I just ate what was on the table and on we went. Later that evening—the mother called my mom and she said, "I don't know what we have to do about this, and I am willing to meet with whoever I have to meet with, but Greg ate lunch with us today, and he ate chicken, and I know I should have fed him a peanut butter sandwich, but I didn't think about it, so none of us thought about it and he didn't think

about it, so he ate chicken. Do I have to go with you to your priest to get everything taken care of?" Which was tender from her side—not terribly well informed, but informed enough to know she shouldn't have fed me chicken—and she felt terrible about it.

My mother said, "No, no, no—an accident, we don't worry about accidents. That's OK. He's not in trouble because he did it." And they had kind of their moment of truth on that. But I thought it was so really tender that she would have cared enough about me being in trouble in my church, even though she didn't understand my church at all.

These people were very—he was a government lawyer and she was an English teacher in the public school, and in the 1950s they were both white people. They were the presidents of the NAACP in Oklahoma City, so they were very liberal Democrats in that sense. Right. So they were nice to black people and Catholics, which is just kind of funny. They were very—then they were sweet people.

And I used to go to the school, the public school, for the—remember when they did the Maypole thing and they did all that—I could go to that because it's the school where I went to kindergarten. And then they would come with me to our Marian devotions and processions and stuff in the church. We kind of did those kinds of things back and forth with each other. And I was allowed to go to the ice cream social in the Presbyterian Church when they had ice cream. But I was not allowed to go to vacation Bible school.

JE: Really?

GG: Oh, absolutely not. But I'd gone to Catholic school all winter, so I was not at all interested in going to Bible school in the summertime.

JE: You know, when we do this, then memories do come out, because I'm sure that in Grand Forks, North Dakota—I don't know what the Catholic population was—I'm Protestant, say so. But it was Shanley High School. And so we had apparently quite a population because every Friday in public school we had fish, fish on Friday, and that was to accommodate the Catholics apparently, and I never even thought about that.

GG: Where in Oklahoma you had fish on Wednesday.

JE: Why?

GG: Because you weren't going to have fish on Friday because of the Catholics. They're not gonna do that for us.

JE: Well, okay.

GG: That's the difference in Oklahoma. Remember, we're 3% of the population.

JE: Yeah, that's interesting. That's fun—

GG: Because the Catholic kid in a public school had to take his lunch on Friday—his peanut butter sandwich. I can't tell you how much peanut butter I've eaten.

JE: OK, then why was it you couldn't eat meat on Friday?

GG: It was considered a fast, a penance, because Jesus died on Friday and Jesus sacrificed his body for our salvation on Friday, so we did not eat flesh. We could eat fish, but we couldn't eat—warm-blooded or cold-blooded, whatever we are—mammals. You can't eat chicken or beef or pork or any of those things, but you could eat fish, yeah, because one's cold-blooded and one's warm-blooded. So that meant you couldn't eat whale because whales are whatever—all these distinctions—but it was just funny. And now the only time that we have that, now the law is that during the Lenten season, when we're in the penitential season, we don't eat meat on Friday. OK, so we all forget because it's not all the time, right?

But when I was in high school at McGuinness, the big thing that you did every Friday night was at ten till midnight you went to the Split-T and ordered your hamburger, so at five after midnight you could eat your hamburger because it was Saturday. That was just the way— that's what Catholic kids did. They went and ordered their hamburger at five till 12 so they could eat it at ten after 12.

JE: Yeah, that's great.

GG: Well, funny kind of memories from high school. And I loved it because I was supposed to be home at 12:30 and of course I had the car, so I would call at 12:25 and say, "I have three kids in my car. We're just finishing our hamburger. I'll take them home and then come home," but I better call at 12:25.

Chapter 6 – 9:40
Favorite People of the Bible

John Erling (JE): You talked about preaching. You must have enjoyed preparing. You have homilies.

Monsignor Gregory Gier (GG): The difference between a homily and a sermon is the homily is supposed to be a reflection on the scriptures that you've just read, and a sermon can be on any topic you choose. It doesn't have to come out of the scripture readings for that day.

JE: All right, so you must have enjoyed that.

GG: I loved preaching. I hated preparation. I did it. On Sundays I do not walk into a pulpit without a full text. Now it's written in my own hieroglyphics that I learned by taking notes in the seminary, so nobody can read my homilies but me, except I have one secretary who learned my hieroglyphics and transferred all my stuff to readable text.

JE: Was that distributed to the congregation, a homily?

GG: No, but I have a wonderful homily file that goes back to 1976.

JE: Well, that should be published.

GG: No. People tell me that and I say no. I don't want anybody to know where I stole all that information. I don't want my sources revealed.

JE: What would give you ideas, life experiences?

GG: Life experiences and scripture study—books on scripture. Our liturgy is scheduled. Every Catholic church in the world in the Latin rites has the same scriptures every—like I'm saying the same thing here that they say at Notre Dame, that they say at Cologne, that they say in Nigeria, that they say in Thailand. It's the same liturgy.

We have it divided up into what we call A, B, C, which is really not divided into Matthew, Mark, and Luke. During the A cycle we read the whole Gospel of Matthew, and then we read next year the whole Gospel of Luke, whole Gospel of Mark, and then Saint John's Gospel fills in because Mark's Gospel is kind of short. Saint John's Gospel fills in, and then during Holy

Week we only use Saint John's Gospel. So we end up in a three-year period, we've read all three synoptics and all the major parts of Saint John's just by going to church on Sunday. So that's what you preach on. It's what the scriptures are assigned. The first reading is usually an Old Testament precursor to whatever the Gospel is. And then the middle reading is an epistle of Saint Paul or Saint James or Peter or one of the epistles, but they all blend, they all have a theme that they come together.

JE: So beyond Jesus. Who would be your favorite people of the Bible?

GG: Oh, Saint Peter and Saint Andrew.

JE: And why is that?

GG: Well, Peter because he's the guy— I have two loves of Peter. One of my greatest loves of Peter is Jesus pulling him out of the water and saying, "You of little faith. Why didn't you just get in the boat? What's wrong with you? Just walk across the water," and I so often just see myself going, "Help, pull me out." So I even have a magnificent painting of Jesus pulling Peter out of the water hanging in my office, just to remind me of that.

So Peter for that reason. And then, you know, Andrew's just a guy that asks all the questions and gets in trouble and— no, it's Thomas, Thomas, excuse me. Thomas, the doubt—"I'm not gonna believe he's risen from the dead. Give me some proof. Give me some proof." And then when he gets the proof, he goes way beyond what the other apostles had realized. It's Thomas that is the first one that says, "My Lord and my God." All the rest of them said Jesus has risen from the dead, Jesus is the Messiah, Jesus—but it's Thomas that says, "My God." Those are my favorite people. I also kind of like Jesus' mother because she kind of messes him around every now and then.

I love that whole thing of the marriage feast of Cana in Galilee. When they run out of wine and Mary comes to Jesus and she says, "They've run out of wine, they've run out of wine," and he says, "Mother, what is that to me? My hour has not yet come." And she just looks at him, turns to the guys in charge of the water, and says, "Do whatever he tells you." And then she just looks at him and he goes and makes wine. I would say that is— and I mean this lovingly, not prejudicially—but it's the ultimate Jewish mother. "You will do that. What do you mean it's not your time? I've decided it's your

time, go do it." And he did it. That's one of the reasons we as Catholics like to ask the Blessed Virgin to pray for us when we have needs, because we know she gets her way. That's very basic Catholic theology, by the way.

JE: I'm sure taught to you in Saint Thomas Theological, wherever, yeah.

GG: Mostly taught to me in Rosary School in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, and taught me very much at my mother's knee. Irish Catholicism is very, very united to the love of Mary for her son, Jesus.

JE: But weren't you taken with Peter because he, like all of us as humans, would fail so many times when he said, "I will not deny you at all," and then he did and—

GG: I've lived Peter's life more than I have Mary's.

JE: We have Peters, all Peters, right?

GG: And he's the one that gives you the courage to go to Jesus under any circumstance. Right. And also I have a phenomenal respect—and this is because of my father's respect—I have a phenomenal respect and awe of Joseph, who says nothing at all but takes Mary as his wife, takes them off to Egypt, brings them back to Nazareth. He just does as he is told quietly and effectively.

JE: And it's like he quietly went away because we're not reminded of him.

GG: No. We have a devotion in the Catholic Church to Saint Joseph as the patron of a happy death, because our tradition would say that both Mary and Jesus were with Joseph when he died, and that would be a very happy way to die. We have an altar to that at Holy Family Cathedral—to the death of Joseph.

At the turn of the century, the 1800s to 1900s in the Catholic Church, there was a huge devotion to Saint Joseph as the patron of a happy death, and you go into a lot of churches built in the late 1800s, early 1900s, and you will find a stained-glass window or an altar or a statue to the death of Joseph. Very common.

JE: All right.

GG: Which is totally outside this interview, I'm sure, but—

JE: No, it's not. I'm hoping everybody finds it interesting. I know they will. I do.

GG: There's a whole lot of people who have gone to Holy Family their whole life and don't even know that that altar is Saint Joseph's death. They just know it's Joseph's altar and that one's Mary's altar.

JE: And then the apostle John was assigned to take care of Mary in her final days, and that was in— We have traveled many parts of the world, and I can remember things, but I don't know where I was when we saw that.

GG: Ephesus.

JE: We were in Ephesus. Yes, we were. Yes, yes, yes, yes.

GG: The House of Mary and Ephesus

JE: And we were there. Was it believed—did she die or was she transfigured?

GG: Our belief is that she was assumed body and soul into heaven. Whether or not she died first and then was assumed, or just was assumed, is still up for debate. I'm deeply convinced that she died because Jesus died. But then she was assumed into heaven. She did not ascend to heaven, and it's very clear: one's an active verb, one's a passive verb. She was assumed into heaven, and we believe that she was assumed into heaven because her body was the source of the human body of Jesus, and so it should not decay.

JE: OK, interesting.

GG: Because we believe we're all gonna go to heaven body and soul in the end anyway. So it's just an early thing for her.

JE: Right. And then we were in chorus—

GG: Oh, okay.

JE: And we saw where the apostle Paul spoke, and where he was tried, one of his many times tried in court. I distinctly remember that, and we walked where he apparently had walked, and then how he spoke in this amphitheater. And they said this is where he stood and he spoke, and I could only believe that that was true.

GG: We have a priest in the diocese who's a very good friend of mine, who was one of my assistants, has been to every place known where Paul preached.

JE: Wow.

GG: He's been— and some of them, you know, it's just a little plaque in the middle of the desert, but he's been to all of them.

JE: Well, and that came about because we were, of course, on a cruise of Greece, and then we stopped off on those places. It was one of my more meaningful trips.

GG: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

JE: Right.

Chapter 7 – 11:40
Challenges of the Church

John Erling (JE): Some of the biggest challenges maybe you faced as a priest. Is it the changing times? Is it the way we did it and the way we do it now, and some of that may have gone into this?

Monsignor Gregory Gier (GG): Well, certainly. I was ordained in 1967. The Vatican Council ended in 1965, and so like in the first ten years of my priesthood, something changed every year. People don't realize it—when I was ordained, the Eucharistic prayer, what we call the canon of the Mass—which is when we do the consecration prayers—was still in Latin. The alfaory prayers where we offered the bread and wine up to the Lord were still in Latin, and there were three other prayers called the Orations were in Latin. The scriptures were all in English. And the prayers for the halter wording, so it was half English, half Latin when I was ordained.

I was ordained in May. In October it all went to English because they finally got the translation that Rome would accept. And so all of a sudden I was praying in English, which was nice. It was more comfortable for me than the Latin, but I had practiced that Latin for eight years, so I could say it effectively from the altar.

Then the next thing that changed, I think, was we went from two scripture readings every Sunday to three, and that's when we moved to that Matthew marked Luke thing, and we included now the Old Testament, and that introduced the Catholic Church to sections of the Old Testament we had never read in our churches before, and it really broadened our scriptural understanding. It was wonderful, that part, but it was an interesting challenge now because you had a whole another thing to preach about. Then I think the next thing that changed was the structure of the prayers that began Mass and the prayers of the operator and the prayers that ended Mass. Those changed.

And then through the years you got different translations. I think I've been through about six different versions in the 58 years I've been ordained. So that was always a challenge to readjust it. I remember the last challenge—it was 40 years between the changes. We got this new thing called the Roman Missal, and it's very nice now that I'm used to it, but one of the sisters that had worked with me was in retirement at her mother house, and on my Christmas card—because we started this new thing on the first Sunday of Advent—she says, "How do you like the new approach to the liturgy?" So I wrote her back and I said, well, I used to pray, now I read the words. Sure I'm in the right place at the right time, but I'm over that now. But that happened so many times.

That was always a challenge. Also, it was a huge challenge to make all of this comfortable for the people in the pew and help the transitions be easy and comfortable and to make sense. Historically and theologically it's a great challenge to present it in a way that it could be understood and—well, maybe not liked—at least accepted as legitimate, and that took a lot of work. Took classes, it took sermons, it took attitude, it took all that kind of stuff, and that was a huge challenge.

JE: Since I'm unfamiliar, is there a homily at every Mass?

GG: There can be, yes, and it's preferable that it is. On weekdays it's about three or four minutes. On Sundays it's probably about twenty.

JE: So in the course of a week, how many Masses will there be?

GG: Well, every day it's a Mass. Like at Holy Family, we have Mass at 7 and at noon. Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, we have Mass at 8 on

Saturday morning and 5 on Saturday evening, and the Saturday evening is a Sunday Mass. Then there's Mass at 8, 10, 12, and 5 on Sunday.

JE: OK, why so many?

GG: To get all the people in and to make it available for the nurse that's working, the person, you know, because everybody isn't free on Sunday morning. That's just not real, and so we have an obligation to go, so we have to make it available to go. But that was a huge change, because in the church I grew up in, you couldn't start Mass after noon. So the latest Mass in your parish would be usually 11 or 11:30. And then we introduced the Sunday night Mass. Part of that was because of what we call the Eucharistic fast. When I grew up, if you were going to go to communion, you had to fast from food and drink from midnight. Wow. So it would really be hard to do with the 5 o'clock Mass on Sunday night if you've been fasting from midnight to Saturday. So when that changed, then you could have Mass on Sunday night.

JE: You said you felt that you have an obligation to go to Mass. Did I misunderstand that?

GG: No. It's a law of the Catholic Church that the Catholic is to attend the Eucharistic celebration every weekend, yes. It's a moral obligation of a Catholic to do that. Now, a lot of people don't do it because they don't understand the whys, but the law of the Church is, if you're a Catholic, you're supposed to attend Mass with your fellow Catholics and celebrate the Eucharist together every week. And on Sunday, the Lord's Day. Or Saturday night. One of the things about our liturgy is the reason we can have Saturday night Mass is because on great feast days we always begin them in the evening of the night before. It's part of our Jewish heritage of sundown the day before begins the day, and we still have that in our liturgy.

JE: The younger generation is coming along, and I think not just the Catholics but all denominations face this: They feel they're not as connected to the church, that the church doesn't really meet their needs. And so—

GG: Certainly the church isn't gonna tell me what I ought to do.

JE: Right. And so there doesn't—and attendance too overall, not just young people—has dwindled in all denominations, and so—

GG: It's not unique to any of us. It's just across the board.

JE: Right. Right. Is that something that's—

GG: That's even starting to happen to the mega churches.

JE: So is that something that the church just accepts, or do you try to bring them back or make them more attractive to them, or what do we do?

GG: We have—I can't tell you how many programs we have for what we call re-evangelization. Re-evangelization or returning Catholics or something of that nature. Probably every parish in the country has a program like that at least once a year. Then we also have a thing called—now it's called, used to be called RCIA, now it's called OCIA—order of Christian education. It's instruction classes on how to be a Catholic. It runs from like the middle of August through till Easter. And it's an instruction class on what we believe as Catholics.

A lot of Protestants attend it, but an awful lot of non-practicing Catholics come through that program to look at it, because like they say, the last time I went to religion class was in the 8th grade at Rosary School, or the last time I went to religion class was at Bishop McGinnis High School or Catch Hall, and I have never addressed the church intellectually as an adult. And that's what those classes are about. And they do wonders for reinvigorating fallen away—what you call them. I love it. It used to be ex-Catholics or you were a fallen away Catholic or you were former Catholic. Now the term is very interesting and I kind of laugh when I hear it: I was raised Catholic. "I was raised Catholic." They don't say, I'm not a Catholic anymore. They say, "Oh, I was raised Catholic." That's a funny thing. But those classes—they've gone in every parish every year. There's something to reinvigorate.

But so oftentimes, the reason the person has gone away from the church is because they've been married three times. We are somewhat serious about our sacramento matrimony. And we take that very seriously. And so if you have been married in the eyes of the Church and you end up in a divorce, you have to go through what we call an annulment process, and a lot of people don't like that.

JE: So people quit going to church.

GG: Yeah.

JE: You probably—I'm not gonna say driven—but anyway, probably a vast majority of your loss of attendees is because of that.

GG: A lot of it has to do with marriage, yes. And a lot of it has to do with— a lot of it in today's world has a lot to do with feminism. Because we still don't have ordained priests as women. We still believe that family is male and female. We still believe that as you are created is as you should be, and you don't go and make an adjustment to your body because you want to—

JE: LGBTQ is what we're talking about.

GG: We don't fit in there very comfortably at all. And so if you have people that are dealing with that trauma and dealing with that reality in their lives, they often aren't comfortable in Catholicism. Although Catholicism in many ways is much more gentle about that than a lot of other churches. So we would never say you can't come to church. We would never say you aren't part of us. We never say that. In fact, the Church says once you're baptized, you can't get out—you're ours. We don't let go. They might flee the coop, but we don't cut the cord.

JE: Are those issues going to have to be dealt with in the future, like females in leadership? Do you think that'll ever be addressed?

GG: Well, I think the females in leadership is very much a huge adjustment in the Catholic Church at the moment. I think it's interesting that Pope Leo, in his what they call decay that he was in charge of in Rome that was the one that determined who would be the next bishops—they feeded all that—on his staff were three nuns. Really. And he has said they were immensely, immensely valuable in his evaluations and his decisions. He has great respect for them.

It would not surprise me greatly if he puts one of those in charge of that to Castro. Catri is like the organization that determines who becomes the next bishop someplace. And then there's a Diastri for education. We'd call them committees or something. In the Catholic Church we have to have our own term. We can't just use anybody's term. I'm sure Diastri comes out of some Latin term that has to do with it.

Chapter 8 – 12:45
Pope Leo

John Erling (JE): And weren't you thrilled that the Pope Leo was American?

Monsignor Gregory Gier (GG): I was so shocked I couldn't see straight. I was awed by that. And the other thing that's fun about it—"an American pope, an American pope!" Well, he's not an American pope, but he's an American pope that has ties to Tulsa because he was the superior of the monks that run Cascia Hall. He was their superior at two levels. At one time he was superior of the Chicago province, which is where our Cascia Hall people come from, so he was their provincial, and for twelve years he was the world provincial in Rome of the Augustinian Fathers.

What a lot of people don't realize—and this I think had a lot to do with his being elected—as the head of the Augustinian community in Rome, they have houses, schools, or parishes in sixty countries. And as the head of that community, he had to visit every one of those houses. And so, as he told his cardinals, the third meeting he had with his cardinals, he looked at them and he said, "My brothers, I have been in most of your countries."

JE: When you say houses, you mean countries.

GG: When I say houses, I mean like Cascia Hall, the school, or if they had a parish. And he had to— it was his job.

JE: Did you ever meet him?

GG: No. If he was at Ray Siegfried's funeral—at that time he was superior in Chicago—he well may have been, but there were so many priests, Augustinians, and priests from Notre Dame. I met a lot of people, but I don't remember them all, and I may have met him then, but I don't remember it. That would be unfair for me to say I know him.

So we have an interesting story—"Oh my gosh, an American pope. An American pope with ties to Tulsa." The young man that was just ordained, Father Williams, was a deacon at the North American College in Rome. The Vatican puts out, "The Holy Father will be saying Mass at this place, we need deacons if anybody would like to volunteer."

So three weeks before he came home to be ordained a priest, he saw that the Holy Father was going to be saying Mass in Saint Peter's Square for this Holy Year of the Family. He ran down to the sacristy at Saint Peter's and signed up to be the deacon. So he ends up the deacon for that Mass. Before Mass, he's introduced to the Holy Father. He says, "Your Holiness, I'm Deacon Robert Williams, and I am from Tulsa, Oklahoma." Leo looks straight—"Did you go to Cascia?" The Holy Father is asking some kid if he went to Cascia Hall.

Robert said, "No, I didn't go to Cascia. I went to the diocesan high school." He said, "Oh, you went to Kelly." So here's the Holy Father who knows all about high schools in Tulsa, Oklahoma. I never thought I would see that in my life. Let alone an American pope.

JE: I don't know if there are other Protestants—I'm sure like myself—we're real taken with the Pope.

GG: Yes.

JE: My house, where the Pope— you are a multitude. And even though we don't want to be a Catholic, we want to like the Pope, and we like Francis because he was so progressive, and it's a feeling that Pope Leo may be the same—

GG: Very much the same, but a little more sophisticated in how he does it. But here's the difference— it's going to be very simple. Francis, his whole life, was an Argentinian. He was a Jesuit. He was educated as a Jesuit. He was head of the Jesuits in Argentina when he was thirty-six years old, during the Dirty War. Then he became an auxiliary bishop and then the cardinal archbishop, but his whole life was in Argentina. So his whole approach to everything was kind of casual, and that was what drove the Romans. The Romans didn't know what to do with that; they were so proper.

I think that ease is what Protestants really liked. It scared some Catholics because they thought, "Oh, he's going to say something, it'll be misinterpreted." I don't think we ever accused him of saying something that was wrong, but we always said he left himself open for misinterpretation more than other popes did. He was the first pope that wasn't raised in a world of nobility. Even Benedict was raised in Germany—there was a sense of the old guard and all that. So if you

became the Pope, you became a nobleman. Francis had none of that. He was raised in Argentina—he was an American—so when he got into all of that he had no predisposition about how it should be. He had a freedom that was wonderful, and that's what we all loved about him.

Leo has been the head of the Augustinians internationally for twelve years. He's been a bishop in Peru. And for two and a half years, he was a cardinal in Rome running one of the biggest programs for the Curia—the ruling of the Church. He's got lots of political moxie. He's brilliant, they say, in listening, understanding, pausing, and then deciding. That wasn't what you saw in Francis. Part of Francis is Jesuits just say things to shake you up, to make you think—that's Jesuit. Augustinians aren't that way.

So it'll be different, but I think you'll find his theology very one-on-one with Francis. Francis is the one that made him a cardinal. Francis is the one that put him in charge of choosing bishops for the entire Church. Obviously they knew each other very well. They met every single day. I think it's a wonderful blend—he's been able to do things that would have been common and comfortable for Benedict, and he's able to do things that are common and comfortable for Francis. I think he's going to be good for us.

JE: And I know that he's called for full respect for humanitarian law in the crisis in Gaza, and messages around World Day of Migrants and Refugees—he described migrants and refugees as messengers of hope. Do you think the Pope's words carry much weight to the rest of the world just because he said that, or address those issues?

GG: I would like to think they do, because everybody at least hears them. The poor man can't say anything that isn't all over the world, so they at least know that's what he thinks. The Roman Catholic Church has always been, at least in modern times, neutral politically, so that they're available to bring negotiations from either side. It's why he meets with the Palestinian leaders.

People don't understand that the Roman Catholic Church has a diplomatic program that has been functional in this world for over 900 years. They have been a major source of diplomacy for over 900 years. They are often the first door that's opened in negotiations. It's never noticed or acknowledged, but I know some of the people doing it, and it's very

important.

So what he says—he has to be careful how he says it—but he also has to make it very clear. He is not for war. He is for peace, and all of them have said that. "War no more, war no more, war no more," was Paul VI to the United Nations fifty-five years ago. How effective is it? Who knows. But I think too, Reagan was very good in understanding the role of the papacy, and a lot of people don't understand that. Reagan and JP2 worked very much hand in hand in bringing down the Wall.

JE: All right, meaning President Reagan and—

GG: Pope John Paul II. Because remember John Paul II was a bishop in Poland before he was the Pope. As the Cardinal Archbishop of Krakow, he was behind and in charge of the whole Solidarity movement in Poland. And the Solidarity movement in Poland is pretty much what brought down the Iron Curtain in Poland. Once he became the Pope, he had a whole other level of clout, and he and Reagan worked hand in hand on that. A lot of people don't know that.

JE: No, that's interesting. I interviewed Francis Rooney.

GG: Did you?

JE: Yeah, he was the U.S. ambassador to the Holy See for three years, and I thought this was a cute story. The day he was going to meet the Pope—JP2—his family was with him and they weren't going to meet him, but they went with him, drove, and were going to go meet the Pope. He said, "I went in one room and then I went into another room, and then finally the doors opened and I walked in up to him." And he said, "I couldn't speak a word. I couldn't say anything. I just couldn't say a word." And JP2 put him at ease. And Francis says, "Does that happen to other people?" He says, "Oh yes, it happens to other people." The reason for them to meet, of course, was issues that Francis Rooney wanted to bring as an ambassador of the United States. They wanted the Pope to know that we are concerned about these issues. But I thought that was kind of cute.

GG: His little old Catholic Irish heart could not speak. That's exactly what happened. I've known Francis since he was very young, and I can see that happening very beautifully.

There's also—and Francis probably wouldn't have told you this—Francis was smart enough to know that there is a certain hands-off to the United States, a little bit. We're an international power, but capitalism is not the most revered thing in Italy and so forth. He kind of knew that. So he decided that when he met with all the different cardinals—when he went to all the different dicasteries to meet all the people in charge—he would go in and say, "Could we please speak in Spanish? I'm much more comfortable in Spanish than I am in Italian." And of course the cardinal was much more comfortable in Spanish than he was in English, and he said the atmosphere in the room just changed immediately. Because he had some sensitivity to another language, some sensitivity to them. He said it made his negotiations in the Vatican five times easier because he was willing to do it all in Spanish, and he's very fluent in Spanish.

Chapter 9 – 17:36
Decision Made at 17

John Erling (JE): Some of the challenges facing the Church—there's a shortage in priests, I believe, aren't there?

Monsignor Gregory Gier (GG): We are in a—we'd like— but you know, every organization would like to have 100 more leaders then what they've got. But yes. Our concern in this diocese at the moment is we will lose a third of our priests in the next five years in retirement, because they're all right at that age of 70 to 75, and about a third of our priests are at that age. So that's— they're all gonna have to be replaced somehow.

JE: How about the seminaries? Are they not—

GG: We have, I think, 18 men in the seminary at the present time. But remember, like five of those 18 men are freshmen in college. They've got eight years before they're ordained. Right, and if you've got five, only two of them are going to be ordained.

Rural Oklahoma, as you are very well aware of, is dying. We have parishes in Krebs, Idabel, Hugo, Durant—all those places down. In another ten years, are those towns even going to exist, let alone be big enough to have a

Catholic parish? So the need for some of the rural priests is going to be different too. There are two things happening at the same time.

Because, like, most of the parishes that we've closed—we've closed missions in southern Oklahoma because there aren't any people left. I remember when a good friend of mine, one of my former associates, was pastor on the mission in Lehigh, Oklahoma. There were three ladies, two sisters and a friend, who were the only parishioners in that parish. Other people came there to Mass because of the convenience—that's where Saturday evening Mass was—so Colgate and some of those people came. But they came to the pastor and said, "You've got to close this place. We can't take care of it. The three of us just can't do this anymore." So they had a big celebration of the life of that parish and all that, and closed it up, and they all went to Colgate to Mass.

JE: Wow, that was sad for them, was it?

GG: Oh yeah, but it was nice that they were wise enough to know we can't keep this up. Since then we've changed—there's no pastor in Colgate anymore either. They still have Mass once a month there. But as far as the starting up people—yeah, that's that.

So that side of it is one side. Then the other side of the clergy thing in the United States is—well, we'd love to have more priests—we have a very large group of permanent deacons, men that are ordained deacons. A permanent deacon in the Roman Catholic Church can preach. He can do weddings, he can do funerals without Mass, he can give instructions, he can do baptisms. He can do a lot of the things the priest does. And we've got a whole lot of those. So it's kind of an interesting thing how we balance those out.

JE: Let's bring more women in.

GG: Well, there is some discussion of whether or not we could ordain women to be deaconesses. It's not a happy discussion most of the time, but it's at least a discussion. And we will look— we will look and see— have women bishops and women priests saved the Episcopal Church?

JE: Say that again.

GG: In recent history, the Episcopal Church has opened their ministry to women. And if you look at the Episcopal Church today, has that reality saved that congregation? They're losing just as many people as we are.

JE: Right.

GG: The dynamic is pretty much the same. It's very interesting to see it.

JE: The leadership isn't just the Catholic Church.

GG: Oh no, it's across the board, and leadership doesn't necessarily mean the priest that consecrates the bread and wine. I think one of the things that people don't realize is that in the 1950s, Roman Catholic nuns were some of the most powerful people in this country. They were heads of universities. They were heads of hospitals and huge medical programs. I mean, Sister Gottschalk at Saint John's Hospital was as powerful as any woman in this town—more powerful, in a sense, than the bishop.

JE: I'm very proud that I interviewed Sister Gottschalk for Voices of Oklahoma.

GG: Oh, did you? Oh, good. What a precious person she was.

JE: She was coming from Germany, and she said we'd have to salute Hitler. So we have this political, cultural division in our churches. How did you navigate that? Because we have conservatives, we have progressives—dealing with church issues, but politics as well—and you can feel it. How did you handle that? That had to be a challenge.

GG: Well, especially when I was the pastor of Christ the King Parish and Frank Keating and James R. Jones were running against each other, and they were both members of the parish. It was a very interesting three years. I also— I gave James R. Jones Communion the day he was elected our—

JE: Representative from this district.

GG: Right, because he came to Mass at Holy Family that day. And so I've dealt with all of those all of my priesthood, and my job is not to take sides publicly. My job is to be available to the needs of either one.

I had to stand in the pulpit of Christ the King and order a group of people out of the back of the church with their things, because I said, "This church is Frank Keating's parish church. This church is James R. Jones' parish

church. They both have a right to worship, and they are to be here comfortably. So those of you in the back of the church that are here to protest against either one of them—get out of my church."

JE: And that took care of that?

GG: They ran like mice. And then one Sunday I got really tickled. I was praying in the front of the church. James R. Jones was at the wrong Mass—he was at Mass where he never goes—and he was sitting in a pew, and Frank Keating comes down the aisle with his kids, one on each hand, and he sees James R. Jones in the pew. He turns around and goes all the way to the other side.

JE: Oh, really?

GG: Oh, it's just funny. I'm standing there trying to keep a straight face. It was just funny. But you have to— you know, Saint Paul says we are to be available to everyone. And part of you— you just keep your mouth shut. It's none of anybody's business.

JE: Well, right now politically, in this day and age, it's such a dividing issue. It's more than it's been for many, many years, and so I think people are even choosing their friends or un-choosing their friends because of the politics. It's so severe, it's tragic. And I'm sure you've even felt that in your ministry—that you see this happening. I don't know what advice you can give. I don't think you can change anybody's mind.

GG: And the worst thing you can do in my business is try to. Most of the people at that level of intensity for their political opinion are not at all rational. The rational part of their life has gone away, and that's not just Republicans or just Democrats. It's the whole crowd.

JE: So as you are looking back, what gave you the most joy of your service to your Church?

GG: Continuity of ministry to the folks. In this next two months—I gave Father Robert Williams his first Communion. Mother Robert Williams served Mass for me for twelve years at Holy Family. He has now become a priest. His father I taught at Bishop Kelly. There's a huge long connection. His grandmother, after his grandfather died, became a nun, and I was her spiritual director for which communion community she would go to.

That continuity of being part of those families as you see the whole Church. In October I will baptize, I think, three little kids and marry a young man in the Church who, when I first came to Holy Family, was three years old, and at a daily Mass in the little chapel downstairs, while I am standing there saying the holy prayers, he comes up and wraps himself around my leg at the altar and won't let go, and his grandmother's there trying to get him. It's those histories. It's that continuity. The fact that I've been part of their lives is why he's getting married in the Church.

There's a history like that all over the place. And you get things like—you'll get a call, and somebody will say, "Well, Father, da da da da," and I go, "How do you know me?" "Oh, my father— I've been sitting in the last pew at Holy Family Cathedral for the last 15 years. I've never introduced myself, but you have to bury my mother because you're the only one she ever liked in the pulpit." I mean, that kind of stuff. Because there's so much going on out there in that pew about me that I don't know, but just to be aware of that—and it raises its head periodically, and you go, oh, well, I guess I better do this funeral.

It goes back—and I'm very pleased with this—it goes back to the decision I made at 17 years of age: two most important things in my life are my love for people and my love for God. And now, what, 60-some years later, I'm still helping folks know God, and God be available to folks. That's pretty satisfying.

JE: And then those people who reach out— that's your reward, isn't it?

GG: And—or that reach out and say, you know, they're in real big trouble and they just need to talk to somebody, and "I trust you." That's huge. And some of those are just people who trust me because they've heard me preach.

JE: Well, that would be the only way they would know you—

GG: Many—

JE: And—

GG: Many. You know, and then others are kids I taught at Kelly, that kind of thing. But for some of them it's literally, "You're the only priest I've heard I'd trust with this."

JE: Because they never wanted to come up and actually meet you.

GG: Yeah. I had a most marvelous experience with this once. You know, when you do the how-to-become-a-Catholic thing, huge in that whole year—"I'm not making my first confession. I'm not gonna go to confession to some priest. I'm not doing that." And so I just say, well, just calm down and stay, we'll see what happens in the end.

We went through this whole year of this with this one person. So on the Saturday before Palm Sunday is when all those people make their first confessions. And we do a retreat that day and then we go to the box and hear confessions for three or four hours. I noticed this person was at the retreat, sitting there, and I thought, well—

So I sit there and I hear half the confessions, the other priest in that parish hears, Monsignor Alpine hears confessions, we all hear. I'm there about three hours, and I'm ready to leave. I don't have anybody in for about five minutes. I thought they must be all finished; I can leave now. As soon as I get up to start to leave, all of a sudden through the door comes this person, and they slam it, and they sit down. I go, oh. "I thought you weren't gonna do this." "Well, I'm just gonna try it." "OK, sit down."

And then we kind of began. The confession went on and went on and went on and on. About halfway through I got the look—"I've never told anybody in my whole life the stuff I'm telling you right now. I've never told anybody." I said, "Well, you've needed to. This needs to come out." So anyway, we continued. We finished the whole thing, and I did what the priest does—I gave absolution and so forth. And the person got up off the chair and came across the room and grabbed me on both shoulders and shook me and said, "Being a Catholic's gonna be great." Oh my gosh.

So those are very satisfying moments. Those are very satisfying moments. It was just a delight the next day to give that person their first Communion. It was wonderful.

JE: Confession—of course Protestants don't understand that. We do it our own way. But the word cathartic came to me—that some of these people are getting out and talking as they would maybe to a counselor, and telling

you things, and maybe they get relief—I'm sure they do—as a result of it, just to talk out loud to somebody about it, and you're the point of contact.

GG: We save a lot of people money. I think it's one of the reasons psychiatrists don't often like Catholic priests. Right. And also the other thing that you hear from people—and these aren't necessarily Protestants coming into the Catholic Church or Catholics coming back, because an awful lot of people that you hear in our—they've been atheists or they've been agnostics or they just haven't cared one way or the other—and the thing that you hear a lot is, "I love these classes. I love these classes," because she says, "Every night I go home and I realize somebody out there loves me, and I have never had an awareness that somebody out there loves me—and it actually is God. I have no awareness of that." And sometimes they'll look at you and they'll go, "And you don't even know what that's like, do you? Because you've always had it." They're mad at me because I've always known God loved me, you know, but it's new to them and it's immensely consoling.

Would you want to live your life without believing that God loves you? What a way to live. Or that there is a God that cares at all.

JE: Well, they also probably went a long time in their life, they didn't care.

GG: Oh yeah, sure.

JE: And then finally it sunk in that nobody loves me—

GG: And also a lot of that sinks in when the first child is born. "What do I want to give my child? Do I want to give my child that it's all over when he closes my casket?"

JE: Yeah. I think of many, many songs that are written about the love of God. I'm not sure about the songs that you have, but the Protestants have all these gospel songs.

GG: Oh yeah, and we've stolen a lot of them now that we've gone to English, because I don't know what we would have done when we first went from Latin to English. I don't know what we would have done without the Methodist songs—because the Methodist theology isn't that different than ours. And so we could take a lot of the Methodist songs. So we sing a lot of our English songs that we sing—that we think are ours—we stole from the

Methodist hymnal. Not so much from the Baptist hymnal, but from the Methodist hymnal.

JE: I've often thought, while sermons and homilies can be really effective at the moment—

GG: Songs are lasting.

JE: You took the words out of my mouth. They're the ones that are lasting.

GG: Right. They're the thing that goes over and over in your brain.

JE: They do. And for some reason at my age—and I can still run—these songs, going way back to my childhood, I can remember. I don't remember the words, but the melodies are coming back to me, and I can just—and I can't sing, but in my brain I think I can. These melodies are coming to me.

GG: Well, I hope for your sake that it comes back to you strong and clear. "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so." I mean, because I learned that from my Presbyterian neighbors.

JE: I learned that from my mother's knee.

GG: And I learned from my Catholic sisters that taught me that the reason that I existed was to know, love, and serve God in this world and be happy with him forever in the next—was a basic question in the Baltimore Catechism.

JE: And I had Luther's—Martin Luther's—catechism.

GG: Oh, you did? OK. So you would have—would have been probably much the same, because our Baltimore Catechism that we had in this country for years and years and years was simply a German catechism translated into English. So it has to have had at least some taint of Lutheranism.

JE: A taint, yes.

GG: That's the— the Chillicothe, Missouri, that my father grew up in. The tracks divided the Lutherans from the Catholics.

JE: Oh, really?

GG: Yeah. There weren't anybody else—the Lutherans and the Catholics. They were the two Germans.

Chapter 10 – 13:07
How to Be Remembered

John Erling (JE): All right, so then what advice would you give to young men—women too—considering.

Monsignor Gregory Gier (GG): Well, it's interesting—I gave that just last night to our new seminarians. I think none of us can survive in this business if we don't have a very personal, one-on-one—if you want to call it—relationship with God. And whether you're becoming a nun or whether you're becoming a brother or whether you're becoming a priest, or whether you're a priest, you're being called to be a bishop—if you don't believe and have an interaction that this is what Christ is asking you to do, you'll never survive.

It has to be—that has to be the reason. "This is something Jesus wants of me." And I grew up all my life believing that the most basic way to be a happy person in life is to do whatever God created you to do. And if you do what God created you to do, you'll be happy. I never grew up saying, if I'm called to be a priest and I get married and have children, I'll go to hell. That was never part of it. But part of it was, if I'm called to be a priest and I don't do that—I get married and have—I would have been happier as a priest. I won't be miserable as a married person, but I would have been happier as a priest because that was the will of God from my creation.

If that's what you understand, and if that's what your interaction and your realization of who you are and who God is—then move ahead. If you don't have that sense, don't move ahead. Stop. Find out where you and God are like that.

JE: You know, I'm sure there are those who felt the call and they ignored it, and as they got on in life, they said they should have, and it nagged them to their grave.

GG: And you know who are a very interesting group of that in the Roman Catholic Church are the permanent deacons.

JE: Oh really?

GG: Yeah. You know, they didn't leave the priesthood—they ended up marrying, having children—and that sense of "I should have been a priest" is very much partially fulfilled in being a deacon. You will hear that from many of them: "I went to seminary and I quit," or "I never quite went to the seminary, but I thought I should. Now I've become a permanent deacon." Yeah, and that's an interesting dynamic for those people.

The nuns are, you know, again another whole thing. It's interesting that the communities of sisters that are thriving at this moment in our Church—and we have some that are thriving—are the ones who are still wearing habits and still have a very regimented way of community life for this group of women. Like if you are a Mercy Sister out at Saint Francis Hospital, you know exactly who you are as a Mercy Sister, you know why you're a Mercy Sister, you know what we're about, and if you like it, fine, and if you don't—go bye. I don't care. We are who we are.

The Sisters of Saint Francis, the Martyr Saint George, that teach at Saint Catherine's in West Tulsa—the community just exactly like that: we know who we are, we know what we're about, and we know why we're here. We dress like we are who we are, and they both wear definite habits. And it's inspirational. And there's a huge Dominican group of sisters in Nashville, I think, and they're still in the old full habit. But they cannot house all of their younger nuns.

Well, so it's interesting. Like right now, Holy Family at 10 and noon on Sunday morning is virtually standing room only. It's full of young people with five and six kids. It's unbelievable.

JE: So then the younger crowd—

GG: You have a very strong younger crowd at Holy Family at the moment.

JE: OK.

GG: And I think they're with us because we aren't the far, far right wing, and we aren't left at all. We're very much solid in the center of what Catholicism is about, and we have a very high church, very solemn liturgy with very good music. And I mean we are bursting at the seams. And that's just two of five Masses a weekend.

JE: Well then you're kind of answering—we talked earlier about young people, young families or not—but it's—

GG: It's changing. The very same thing's happening in Christ the King. Same thing's happening at Saint Mary's. And it's a younger group now. They're kind of conservative. They are very, very dedicated to being Catholics. And part of them are young people who came into the Church through these programs. We took this year at Easter—we brought 95 people into the Catholic Church at Easter that had been studying that program all year. TU took, I think, 25 kids from TU came into the Church. And I mean, I always know the TU kids because they're a little younger than our kids. They're at Holy Family a lot. They're at daily Mass. It's an interesting dynamic. I'm kind of excited about it.

You know, I was raised in the Church of the 1940s and 1950s when every church was full. And then I lived through the 70s and 80s. It's been an interesting dynamic. I'm delighted to see the resurgence of all of this.

JE: So how long have you been retired now?

GG: Eleven years.

JE: And you—

GG: All they had to do was get rid of me and we could have a resurgence.

JE: Right. They started coming—

GG: Because I went away.

JE: But they celebrated your 50th anniversary.

GG: Yes.

JE: When was that?

GG: 2017.

JE: In 2017, right? And so are you—you're still obviously—

GG: Oh yeah, I say Mass at Holy Family every day.

JE: Right.

GG: Or like this last weekend—because I'm free to do whatever—you know, I'm a substitute priest all over the diocese. And for the last month I've been saying the 8:30 and the 11 o'clock Mass every Sunday at the Maronite Rite Church out at 84th and 169 Highway. The Maronites are Catholics, but they're just not Latin Rite Catholics. They're Maronite Rite Catholics, but they belong to the Church and they're part of us. And so when their pastor—he's a Lebanese priest and he's a religious priest—had to go back to Lebanon to elect their superior, for the month of July I've been saying all their Masses for them. It's delightful. I love it.

JE: But you mentioned Saint Francis Hospital, and I had surgery on my neck. A nun would come by—I was in the hospital for many days. She'd come by. But there was a crucifix on the wall.

GG: Oh, sure. And not a cross either—really a crucifix, right? With a body on it?

JE: It was a crucifix. And as a little Protestant boy, that was something that we did not observe. We did not have crucifixes. We did not have cross. We have the empty cross. But I looked at that every day and it just reminded me of what Christ had done. And yes, we know he went beyond the cross. And I asked for that crucifix.

GG: Oh, did you really?

JE: "Can I take that home with me?"

GG: Did they let you have it?

JE: And they did, and I have it in my office. This Protestant boy—

GG: Good Lutheran child, you may not get to go to— you will have to go to Catholic heaven. They won't let you in Lutheran heaven. No, but you know, the beauty of what you just said is exactly why we have the crucifix. It's to keep us aware of what Jesus did for us. We are not anti-resurrection people. We really aren't. But we are very conscious of the generosity of God to us in Christ, and the generosity of Christ personally to us, and that's why we keep the cross. It's why it's a part of every Mass. It's right there in the church. Don't go to a Catholic church that doesn't have a cross in it.

I did a wedding once with a Jewish girl and an Irish Catholic boy. And we couldn't have the Mass—or couldn't have the wedding ceremony—in

Christ the King Church because, "I'm not getting married in the presence of a crucifix."

JE: Oh, okay.

GG: It's understandable for Jewish people, yeah, because of the whole thing.

JE: Why was she even there?

GG: Well, because the boy is an Irish Catholic.

JE: OK.

GG: Her husband was an Irish Catholic. She was a Jewish girl, very prominent Jewish family in this town.

JE: I should have thought about that a long time ago.

GG: Well, they're both lawyers and I fell in love with the law firm. OK. But I mean he was Irish Catholic from East Coast and she is one of the major Jewish families in this town. OK, but you know what saved us in the end? She would let her children go to Monte Cassino because her brother's children went to Monte.

A lot of people don't know that the charter to open Monte Cassino School by Bishop Kelly—when he invited those sisters to come from Guthrie to Tulsa to open a school—his commission to those sisters was, "Please open a school where Catholic and Jewish children will be safe to go to school." Because in the public school at that time they were basically Baptist schools—whether you want to say they weren't religious or not—they were Baptist.

I mean, when I was in Muskogee, four of the teachers in the high school in Fort Gibson were Baptist ministers. And I had a funeral—we had two kids that were killed, a car that caught fire—but anyway, the girl was from First Christian Church and the boy was from Assumption Catholic Church, but they were from Fort Gibson. So we had the Catholic funeral at Assumption. And all the youth group served, and he's the only knew of these kids.

I was riding in the hearse with one of the teachers—he was standing on the thing, they didn't have a rider—"Get in, come with me"—so he was one

of the teachers in the school who was also a Baptist minister. He was sitting next to me in the hearse going out to the cemetery. So I said, "May I just thank you and congratulate you? Those kids from your high school were so respectful. They were all sitting in the back back there all together. I went out and talked to them before Mass started and explained to them how to follow the book, and all this, but they were so—because I know for a lot of those kids, they've never been in a Catholic church before, and this had to be a little intimidating for them." And he said, "Well, Father, that service just pulls respect out of you. You can't go to that service and not be respectful."

JE: That's great.

GG: And it starts with a 16-year-old carrying a cross down the aisle. So it all begins.

JE: So how would you like to be remembered?

GG: Oh. Well, I will be remembered as the ornery priest. I know that.

JE: Oh, ornery?

GG: Ornery. I'm ornery as I can be. I love to give people trouble, and I know I'll be remembered as that. But I do hope that I'm also remembered as a faithful minister of the Church who loved his people and loved his God and tried to bring them together, and that I was faithful to that ministry throughout my life. I'd really like to be remembered in that way.

JE: It sounds like that's where you will be remembered. I don't know what I thought about going into this interview—

GG: I don't know either.

JE: It's been fun.

GG: It's been delightful.

JE: I've thoroughly enjoyed it.

GG: I have to thank the good judge for suggesting it.

JE: The good judge, meaning Claire Eagan, who suggested it because she sat where you are and told her story and her very Catholic story.

GG: She has quite a story, doesn't she?

JE: Right. She does, right. So how do we send this? God bless—what do we say?

GG: We say amen, hallelujah.

JE: Amen.

GG: Hallelujah.