

When I first decided to pursue the priesthood ... I kept it to myself.

I remember praying, “O God, I’m not sure how I’m supposed to make this happen. Let me know.”

And over time, I eventually became more and more comfortable with the idea ... I quit my job and started full-time studies.

Eventually, I hit “the wall” and when that happened, I prayed, “OK God, you better handle this vocation to the priesthood thing ... I’ll take care of the school work and the academic degree.”

And, you know what the funny thing is ... at the end of my studies, I had an all-day test. When I opened my test booklet – I drew a complete blank.

Realizing that precious time was running out as I unsuccessfully tried to think of something clever to write. I ended up shutting the test booklet. Putting down the pen. And I prayed for between 5 and 10 minutes.

At the end of that time, I began writing, and I supposed the “rest is history.”

My progress toward priesthood culminated two summers ago with my public admission to candidacy for Holy Orders with other seminarians from Saginaw.

But it was that summer that I realized that nothing I had learned in college, industry, or the military had prepared me for the challenges that lay before me. As part of my summer, I spent eight days in silence – asking God to prepare me for the next step.

The most recent steps began last spring with my classmates at St. Paul Seminary with my public declaration of intent to be ordained, and my ordination this past August to the diaconate at the Cathedral.

So, two things are important to note in this. First is that if I’d kept it to myself and my own attempts at moving forward with this – it would never have happened. Second, if I hadn’t continuously brought God into the picture, again – it never would have happened.

In Saint Luke’s Gospel, we are told, “Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart.”

The verbs in the Greek are peculiar forms that imply that in “keeping” and “reflecting” on these things, she didn’t do it alone, but rather “with” someone.

And, this is an important distinction for us to realize. Mary didn’t “keep” these things to herself, nor did she “ruminate” or “stew” on these things alone.

Instead, I believe that St. Luke chose to record these seemingly small actions by using these specific verbs that carry the implication of “with someone” specifically because while Mary did these things – she did not do them alone – but rather she did them in prayer – that is, she did them with God.

Part of the agony of fallen human nature, from the very beginning as recorded in the Book of Genesis, is this desire to isolate ourselves from God. Adam and Eve sin in the garden, and in the next scene they’re hiding from God – isolating themselves – from God.

Yet Mary, not only gives her consent to be the Mother of the Savior ... not only does she conceive and give birth to the Savior, the Son of God, through her own cooperation with God most high ... but from the moment of his birth she takes even the little things ... and she ponders them with God.

And that is what we can take from this, too.

Do we realize how generous God is? God desires to be part of every thought and action we do ... the big things and the small things.

And God desires to be part of our lives ... not just a moment here and a moment there ... but every minute ... every second of every minute ... of every day. Not just on Sundays or Saturdays. Not only on Holy Days – but God desires us to do everything ... every moment “with” him.

So, let us make the effort in these next few days to pray that we might know where we may not have been including God ... and let us beg for the grace to include God in every moment of our days.

And I’m convinced that the more we open our lives to being “with God” and doing “with God” and thinking “with God”... the more successful and fruitful we will find our lives to be.

And so let us make this new year ... the year of Immanuel – the Hebrew phrase meaning “God with us” ... Let us pray that we may open to bring God into everything we do, ... for every moment of every day ... always with God ... and always God with us.