

The night before I was ordained a priest I shook hands with my relatives. They crowded my parents' home, many of them strangers to each other. It was weird seeing them all together in one place at one time. I drove home alone that night, alone but with a headful of thoughts.

I was driving the first car I'd ever owned. It was an old, used, Volkswagen squareback--a tiny station wagon, you rarely see them any more. It was my fifth year in that car, and I loved it very much. It was in terrible condition, but the older it got, the more its character grew. The car had a gaping hole in the floor of the back seat, it wouldn't start in the rain, and it honked every time I turned left. But it got me where I was going.

The next morning I got dressed to be ordained. I left the parish early; I needed to get gas. It was a self-serve station. As I pumped the gas by hand a parishioner shouted from the car opposite me. "Say, aren't you getting ordained soon?" "I'm on my way downtown right now." We smiled at each other, and I drove away.

During the ordination the bishop took my hands--those same hands which had greeted relatives and pumped gas--and he anointed them with chrism. It was astonishing, he poured out the Spirit of God upon my hands. I shuddered to see the puddles in my palms and whispered to the priest next to me, "What do I do now?" He was grinning from ear to ear. "Rub it in." I did. The chrism was soft to touch and sweet to smell, like the presence of God.

I felt at peace with the Spirit as I left the cathedral. There was to be a reception at my parents' home. I walked to where I'd left the car that morning, and my reverie was shattered. My precious little car was covered with crepe paper, tin cans, and shaving cream that spelled out, "Just ordained." I was proud to be a priest, but my car looked foolish.

I fumbled for the keys, ducked inside and drove straight for the house of a friend. I turned left into the drive, the car honked, and my friend asked, "What are you doing here?" I said, "Give me your hose." Several minutes later, rinsing a shaving cream-soaked sponge in a bucket of water, I looked down again at my hands, and I thought, "Years from now, someone's going to ask me what was the first thing I did with my anointed hands after I was ordained." And I would have to answer, "I wrung dirty shaving cream into a bucket." So soon God was teaching me why they anoint priests on the hands. We are anointed for work, we are anointed for ordinary work, we are anointed for dirty work.

St. Paul says when you grow in the knowledge of God you do good works, and the good you do helps you grow in the knowledge of God.

Marion, when the bishop imposes his hands on you tomorrow, we will have our hands there to support you. These hands which are in this church, these hands which nourished you, these hands which nursed your wounds, these hands which played music with you, these hands which joined you in prayer--these hands will give you the Holy Spirit, and they must pledge their undying work for you as you pledge your work for them.

Marion, books will help you grow in the knowledge of God. People will help you grow in the knowledge of God. But when we serve we know God best.