

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

August 2, 2010 at 9:40am

Q & A: Archbishop Gregory Aymond

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Distinctly Catholic

Okay - so I was pretty excited to see my friend David O'Connell get made a bishop on Friday. The thought occurred to me that in this time of crisis in the life of the Church, when everything is all gloom-and-doom, maybe we should get a fuller picture.

I do not know many bishops, but the ones I do know are well-adjusted men who enjoy their work and who are good at it too. So, this week, we are interviewing five bishops about their role in the life of the Church. Today, we hear from Archbishop Gregory Aymond of New Orleans.

The question: What is the best thing about being a bishop in 2010?

Archbishop Aymond:

Some people, trying perhaps to empathize with me, tell me it's an awful time to be a bishop. In some ways, they may be right. It's certainly a challenging time.

I also like to think that it's a time when I can really make a difference. The actions of Church leaders, regrettable often sinful actions, have shone a light on us. As we face issues that are not unique to our individual dioceses, not to our own country, not even to our church, as bishops we can be points of purification and reconciliation. That realization fills me with humility and hope.

I was at a meeting of the Catholic Leadership Institute last week, so the question of what it means to be a bishop is quite relevant. It's been heartening to talk with other bishops; to appreciate and participate in our fraternity. They are men who have humbly accepted the

privilege to be part of the apostolic succession, entering into a 2,000-plus-year tradition.

I use the word privilege with care. I do not mean it in the way that perhaps many would think. The privilege of being a bishop is not in the temporal "perks," such as they are. For an introvert, being thrust into the public limelight -- as bishops often are these days -- can feel at times more like persecution than a privilege!

But it's a privilege to walk into people's lives, in times of joy and in times of storms, to lead and to collaborate with others in the work of Christ. People really are very, very generous. I am humbled every day to witness their dedication, their compassion and their personal integrity to the faith.

It's a privilege to lay hands on and ordain men to the priesthood and diaconate. I've been a bishop 12 years, and I know I don't fully grasp that privilege; I probably never will. We are very blessed to be collaborating with these men in the work of the Church.

This privilege of being a bishop allows me to report that the Catholic Church is alive and well in the United States. There are thousands upon thousands of dedicated priests, deacons, religious and lay people who are living their faith and making a difference. We bishops are a witness to that. We share their stories every day. That makes being a bishop a sacred privilege.

Tomorrow's Interviewee: Bishop Gabino Zavala, auxiliary bishop of Los Angeles.

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