



Standing behind the altar at Our Lady of Fatima Church, the Rev. Ralph Lawrence of Monroe contemplates the approaching celebration of the Diamond Sacerdotal Jubilee of his ordination to the Catholic priesthood. (Staff Photo by Margaret Croft)

## Rev. Lawrence To Celebrate

# Six Decades In Priesthood

Sixty years of service in the priesthood reflect the dedication to the cause of Christianity of the Rev. Ralph Lawrence, 86, of Monroe.

To mark this achievement he will celebrate the Diamond Sacerdotal Jubilee of his ordination with a Concelebrated Mass at Our Lady of Fatima Catholic Church, 3200 block of Concordia, at 5:30 p.m. Monday.

This will be followed by a supper at the Embers Restaurant with priests of the Monroe area attending. Eddie Merhige will be host.

### In Retirement

Father Lawrence, now in retirement, is a guest at St. Joseph's Home on Sterlington Rd. He has one sister, Mrs. Marguerite Sweeney, who resides in Denver.

Looking back on his work, he estimated that he probably has celebrated mass at least 21,900 times. And he hasn't stopped adding to this total. He still says mass every day at St. Joseph's Home.

"The priesthood has been a happy and joyous time and I hope there will be many boys to follow in my footsteps," he observed.

A tribute to the jovial priest who has a good sense of humor, was given recently by the Rev. William J. Lee, S. S., president of St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore, Md.

He told Father Lawrence that "After checking our records we were able to ascertain that the actual date of your ordination was on May 25, 1916." And then on behalf of the seminary and himself extended congratulations on Father Lawrence's achievement. He said, "Your 60 years of priestly services have spanned one of the most turbulent periods of church history."

The son of William Phillip Lawrence and Nora Marie Kennedy, Fr. Lawrence was born May 16, 1890 in Colorado Springs, Colo. He attended Bancroft Elementary and graduated from Colorado Springs High School, attended Sacred Heart College in Denver for two years, afterwards entering the Diocesan Seminary in Denver for two years.

The next four years were spent at the major seminary, St. Mary's in Baltimore, and studying theology. St. Mary's Seminary was staffed by the Sulpician Fathers, a group of priests originally from France, whose speciality was training seminarians for the priesthood. Father Lawrence's class of

1916 was the first class to have four years of theology, he said. Prior to that year, the seminarians were ordained after three years of theology.

While in the seminary studying for the diocese of Denver, he became a very close friend to several seminarians from New Orleans and decided he wanted to serve in the ministry in the south. He was ordained by Cardinal Gibbons in the Cathedral in Baltimore, May 25, 1916, for the Archdiocese of New Orleans.

### Appointment

Archbishop Elenk received him in New Orleans and appointed him assistant pastor at Mater Dolorosa parish on Carrollton Ave., New Orleans. He stayed there for over three years, then he was appointed to found St. Anthony's parish in Baton Rouge. A few years ago he was invited back to St. Anthony's as a guest of honor for the parish's celebration of the Golden Anniversary of its founding. Not many priests can claim that honor. After four years at Baton Rouge, Father Lawrence was sent 60 miles south of New Orleans to Buras and Empire. He served 12 missions on the west side of the river. At that time the roads were dirt and when it rained he was muddied in and would have to go to his missions by boat.

After some time, the Archbishop, realizing that this was too much for one priest, invited the Franciscan Fathers of the Cincinnati Province to come to the Archdiocese and gave them Our Lady Queen of Angels Parish in New Orleans and the mission of Buras and Empire. After leaving Buras, Father Lawrence was sent to St. Briget Church in Schriever for four years.

### To North Louisiana

Father then went to St. Leo Preparatory School in Dade City, Florida where he taught English, Latin and Religion. Then he asked to come to north Louisiana Bishop Greco received him into his Diocese. He has been stationed in Oak Grove, Rayville, and Winnfield. He retired about a year ago and Bishop Graves invited him to St. Joseph's Home.

The celebration Monday also will include the observance of Fr. H. Gerald Bordelon's 20th year in the priesthood. He is pastor of Our Lady of Fatima Church.