


" I am a  
Catholic  
Priest "



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## *Why the Knights of Columbus Advertise Catholic Faith*

The reason is simple. We Catholics want our non-Catholic friends and neighbors to know us as we really are and not as we are some times mistakenly represented.

We are confident that when our religious Faith is better understood by those who do not share it, mutual understanding will promote the good-will which is so necessary in a predominantly Christian country whose government is designed to serve all the people—no matter how much their religious convictions may differ.

American Catholics are convinced that as the teachings of Christ widely and firmly take hold of the hearts and conduct of our people, we shall remain free in the sense that Christ promised (John VIII, 31-38), and in the manner planned by the Founding Fathers of this republic.

Despite the plainly stated will of the Good Shepherd that there be "one fold and one shepherd," the differences in the understanding of Christ's teaching are plainly evident. It has rightfully been called "the scandal of a divided Christianity."

If there is anything which will gather together the scattered flock of Christ, it is the nationwide understanding of the Savior, what He did and how He intended mankind to benefit by the Redemption.

To this end, we wish our fellow-Americans to become acquainted with the teachings of Christ as the Catholic Church has faithfully presented them, since the day the apostles invaded the nations of the world in willing and courageous obedience to Christ's command: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations..." (Matt. XXVIII, 19).

**SUPREME COUNCIL  
KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS  
Religious Information Bureau  
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# A FEW THOUGHTS ABOUT PRIESTS

I'm a priest — a Catholic priest — or if you wish, a Roman Catholic priest.

I'm a priest in the present year of Our Lord, when to many people being a priest is unusual and different... while to others, it is all out of place.

I dress differently from other professional men. I do not marry and though many people call me "Father", I have no children of my own. I am a college graduate with university degrees. Yet by the standards of the other so-called "learned" professions, my income is very low, amazingly low, you would say, if I told you the scale paid priests in the United States.

I work a hard and steady week. Very little of my time is my own, for the people come to me when they wish and I am likely to be called out of bed in the middle of any night; someone's sick in the hospital, an accident down the highway, sudden death threatening a dear one in the family.

If you are not a Catholic, you probably have met or at least seen a Catholic priest at some time or other. Bing Crosby played a typical



priest in two highly successful motion pictures. You may see me in the stands at a ball game. I play golf when I can spare a few hours. And if you were in the Services, Army, Navy, or Marines, you may have had a Chaplain who was a priest like me.

Non-Catholics tell me that I seem different... and I am.

I am the inheritor of an office which goes back to Christ. You will look far back into human history to find a generation or a nation without priests. Even if you go back beyond the time of Christ you will find priests. It is only when you come to very modern times that you will find people, and even Christians, attempting to serve God without priests.

It is a deep human intuition, as well as an ancient Divine revelation, that makes people feel the need of priests. They feel that if they have a professional to take care of their health, and a professional to plead their cause in a law court, and professionals to teach them and their children, and professionals to handle the news of the world, and professionals to be

trained for government, they need a professional who knows how to serve God with his whole life and to help them save their souls.

Whether men believed in the true God or false gods, they always have felt the need of picking out some of their numbers to be priests. "It is your sole job to worship God. It is your job to lead us in worship and to see that we have what we need for our spiritual welfare." So in all the ages of history, certain men were selected; they dressed differently from the rest of the people; they devoted their whole activity to honoring God for the people and representing the people before God.

Although mine is the office of a Catholic priest, I am still a man chosen from among men. I know my own weaknesses, my faults and limitations. I may not have a better mind than yours. In God's sight you may be holier than I am. You may have had a finer education than I. Yet if you are a doctor who brings health to the people, I am a priest whose job it is to bring God and His grace to the people. If you plead as a lawyer for your clients, the people are my clients and I plead in prayer and at the altar with our Divine Judge. You may be an expert engineer who builds great bridges; I am supposed to be an expert who keeps in repair the bridge between time and eternity so that you and others may be helped to cross safely from earth to Heaven. You may be a professor teaching astronomy; I am a teacher going beyond the stars

to find and teach the truth of the Eternal God. Your business may be steel or autos or flour or meat; my business is what Christ called "My Father's business," and it is mighty important business for you.

So as a priest, I have a highly important speciality, God, His truth, and the salvation of your soul.

I'm supposed to devote myself full time to that and only that.

Incidentally, I may seem to do many other things. As a priest, I may be a professor, an editor, a builder, the manager of a church and related buildings, the Chaplain in a hospital, a social worker, the director of a boys' camp, a radio speaker, a TV personality, something of a financier, a psychologist, or a man in public relations. These and a hundred other jobs may be mine but they are all subordinated to two things:

*I must work to bring you close to God.*

*I must bend all my energies to bring God close to you.*

I must love God and serve Him full time.

I must love you simply and devotedly, unselfishly and with no thought of personal gain. You are my family, and if you call me "Father," in my heart, whether I be young or old, I look upon you as my children.

As St. Paul said with deep emotion to the Corinthians (I Cor. IV: 15), "In Jesus Christ through the Gospel I have begotten you."

As a Catholic priest I feel myself close to the Jewish priests of the Old Law. The Jewish priest-

hood lives on in me; Jesus Christ Who came not to destroy but to fulfill, did not wipe out the Jewish priesthood. He perfected it in Himself as St. Paul makes clear in his Letter to the Hebrews. And at the Last Supper He delegated His priesthood to His Apostles and to all their successors through generation after generation down to me.

When did I think of becoming a priest?

Very early indeed. Then the adolescent world closed in around me, and I thought of many other professions—the law, medicine, advertising, and even the theater. But in the end, something inside me said, "Give your whole life to God. What profession could equal the profession that serves God and the people? All things pass save God and the immortal souls of His people. This is your work in life." I had known priests and admired them. So I talked things over with several of them. They felt I had the education and sufficient intelligence to take on the tough studies that prepare a priest for his professional duties. I had the health sufficient to aspire to "take up His Cross daily and follow Him." And a Bishop was good enough to say that he would accept me into the ranks of the priesthood in one of the many works that made up his diocese. Moreover, I wanted to save my own soul, to help others to save their souls. I wanted to love God with my whole heart and soul and mind and strength.

Maybe I was too ambitious.

Maybe as a priest I have far missed my mark.

But it has been a wonderful life and I would not trade it for any other life that is given to men to live.

Let us make one thing very clear: no one forced or compelled me in any way. It was I who talked to a priest about the priesthood before a priest talked to me. My mother was happy when I told her of my intentions; but though she had prayed for a priest son, she had never told me she had.

During the long years of preparation for the priesthood, the doors of the Seminary swung both ways. At any time I could have packed my bag, and, with a wave to my professors and associates, gone back to my old life. All that was or would be expected of me was explained in detail. Nothing was secret or hidden. No surprises came to me after Ordination except the surprise that is constant—how pleasing it is to serve the Lord.

My father had hoped that I might follow in his footsteps, for our family tradition was business and law. Though he had been a convert to the Catholic Church only a short time, when I left home he shook my hand and said: "If God wants you and you want God, go ahead and be a priest. But by all means be a good one."

So God was generous and I became a priest.

In simple honesty I feel myself incredibly lucky. I am happy to share my life with other men. So I find it easy to talk of what it means to be a priest.

# THEY DON'T LIKE PRIESTS

Two classes of people usually look down upon priests:

One group says: "The ignorant fools. Nobody but a stupid, uneducated person could ever be a priest."

The other says: "How clever and smooth these priests are! They have been well trained to fool the people. They have been educated to lies and the technique of deceit."

Both miss the truth considerably.

Let me tell you about my education as a priest and you can judge for yourself.

I spent the first two years of my school life in public schools. But my parents felt I should get an education in religion as well, how to serve God and save my soul, along with my education in how to take care of my body and stock my mind with the information I needed for life and to make a living.

So I went to a Catholic school taught by Sisters, one of whom quite frankly prayed that I would be a priest some day. But she never mentioned her hope or her prayers to me until I finally became



a priest. Her own love of God and her deep devotion to us youngsters made me a better boy and from good boys naturally, and with the help of God, come good priests.

In high school I was taught by the Christian Brothers. Then I finished my college training with an A. B. degree from a small Catholic college which since my days has become a large and influential Catholic university. Although I had an inclination toward the priesthood during my earliest years in school, this inclination left me during my college days in which I obtained a degree in English with a minor in philosophy and science; and I left college all prepared to take up law.

But then it was that God seemed to say to me "How would you like to come My way instead?" It was such a distinct calling that with short notice to anyone I packed up and went to a Seminary.

Seminaries are altogether unique places. I doubt if you could ever put one of them into a novel or tell their story on a screen. People have tried, but priests who know

Seminaries from their own happy days there, shake their heads and smile: "You must have gone through a Seminary before you can really catch the spirit."

Well, the spirit of a Seminary may be difficult to describe but it is unmistakably felt.

There were some 300 young fellows in my Seminary, normal lads who loved sports, who talked loud and laughed vigorously, who ate the treasurer into a constant deficit, who had the bounding high spirits of the young everywhere, but at the same time a strange and surprising depth of character and grip on ideals.

They had come from almost every walk of life. Some were from poor families and some from families fairly well off. There were all the national strains of race and ancestry. There were few if any dullards for these had fallen by the wayside educationally before they reached the Seminary gates. There were fellows of real genius and there were plodders; fellows with golden tongues and slight stammers; those with quick intelligence and those whose minds were slow but thorough.

Three hundred men living together cannot fail to put a natural strain on character and disposition. Some dropped out almost at once, and a few stopped just before they reached Ordination. They had wanted to be priests, but for various reasons decided that the life was not for them; or they suddenly realized they were in the wrong spot. No one thought ill of them when

they waved their cheerful or regretful farewells.

Every young man in the place carried his personal duties as the Cadets do at West Point or Annapolis. Each one cared for his own room, made his own bed, and helped serve at table. We had no servants so we served one another.

The spirit of the place was calm and friendly, companionable and sympathetic. We frankly liked our associates, and though there were some whom I liked better than others and even some who set my nerves on edge, we got along in the spirit of "give and take." We were all possessed of the same purposes. We had come because we wanted to serve God and our fellowmen — and the Seminary expected us to start both jobs right then and there.

Our faculty was worth knowing and meeting. We liked them. I'd be exaggerating if I said that they were all inspiring teachers, but where does any student find a whole faculty of men of genius and enthusiasm? They were scholars with graduate degrees, many of them from Rome, Louvain, and other great universities of America or Europe. If we did not arrive with a thorough grounding in Latin or Greek, we got it at once. All of us had our training in literature, secular history, and the sciences before we reached the Seminary. I had gotten mine in college. Many of my associates had gone to a Preparatory Seminary, a high school and college department where straight high school and college courses are given. But we

all faced together six years of professional studies leading to the priesthood.

What, some may wonder, does a Catholic priest study in the Seminary?

Well, before all else, and beyond all else, he studies his own soul, the law of God, and the commandments and counsels of Christ. At the end of six years, he is supposed to come out remade as far as possible in the pattern of Christ.

He rises at six, spends a half hour in vocal prayer and another half hour in personal meditation. He goes to Mass and receives the Lord in Holy Communion. During the day, he reads from the great books on Christian practice and the full Christlike life. Spiritual guides are provided for him and he is expected to go to the Sacrament of Confession once a week.

During the day the bell calls him to the chapel where he firmly believes Christ lives on the altar to enlighten his mind and inspire and strengthen his will with the grace that Christ alone can give. Each class begins with prayers, each meal with prayer; and the day ends with all on their knees in the chapel offering to God the day's harvest of knowledge and experience and the rest and peace of the night.

His studies from the beginning are severe and taxing.

Two full years are given to the study of philosophy and the natural sciences. He studies the thought of the world's great thinkers; he trains his mind to be aware of the world around him and to understand its

meaning, organization, and the laws that govern its precise operation.

Then come the full four years of essential priestly studies.

The major study is theology. This is the study of the word of God as it is found in the Scriptures with their interpretations by the greatest scholars and teachers in the long history of the Church, the story of Christian teaching from the earliest times to the present day, based on the systematic and scientific plan drawn up by one of the world's greatest scholars, Thomas Aquinas.

No one who has studied theology has any idea of its vast scope and scientific approach. It is the net result of generations of great Christian thinkers. Into it has been poured the best of ancient learning, the cream of Christian thought and the constant discoveries of modern science, philosophy, and historic and archeological findings.

The young seminarian is prepared to guide the spiritual lives of people through the study of the laws and practices of the spiritual life, through the study of psychology, and the art of Christian living that equips him, according to his native abilities, to assist people with their ideals and problems.

He is given a thorough grounding in all branches of the study of the Scriptures. He is familiarized with authors who have attacked Christianity and the Catholic Faith. Those whom the Church histories call heretics and schismatics are given a hearing, a chance to present their case, and the strength



of their arguments and proofs are carefully measured.

The course of study in the Seminary includes subjects which range from the Hebrew language to modern psychology, from church management to sacred eloquence, from modern languages to the history of religion. The seminarian is given a rigorous training, four to five hours of class a day, and in the intervals long periods of study in the library or in his private room.

The weekly holiday and extra free days find the seminarian on the baseball diamond, the tennis court, the basketball floor, picnicking with his associates, exploring the countryside around the Seminary on long walks, visiting neighboring hospitals, or teaching religion

to underprivileged people.

There are degrees after my name, academic degrees, which I never use. For to my college years, I added the full six years of Seminary training, and finished as a trained specialist in my field.

Like many of my associates, I have studied in universities to get still further degrees, reaching out for whatever might help me to be more effective in the particular field in which I would serve God and my fellowmen.

But the most wonderful degree I can write after my name, I wrote when my Seminary days were over. At that moment I was entitled to sign myself, as I so wished,—Catholic priest. To my mind that remains the finest “degree” any man can claim.

“The priest must be equipped with learning suitable to his state; and so the Church insists that before receiving the priesthood a man must study philosophy, theology, sacred scripture, canon law, Church history, and various other ecclesiastical subjects for at least six years. Moreover, this presupposes that he has completed a high school and junior college course. Clerical studies are usually made in an institution especially adapted to the preparation of candidates for the priesthood, called a seminary. Besides acquiring the suitable knowledge for the clerical state, seminarians are expected to make progress in virtue, and are supervised and directed by prudent and edifying priests. During his years in the seminary a young man can study and test his own character and motives, and find out whether or not he is fitted for the priesthood and whether he is willing to undertake the arduous tasks of the ministry. If he decides that it is better for him not to advance to the clerical state, he is always free to leave the seminary. If he determines to receive Holy Orders, he is given the tonsure and the minor orders during his third or fourth year. Usually the cleric is ordained a subdeacon at the end of his fifth year, a deacon several months later, and a priest at the end of his sixth and final year of study.”

# "SO I BECAME A PRIEST"

No priest ever has written a really good account of his own Ordination.

Many authors have tried to describe how a young priest feels the day he is ordained, but their stories are inadequate, incomplete, surface-scratching.

The Day of Ordination rates capital letters. It is a day unlike all other days in life. Long, happy and expectant years have led up to it. The young man has studied seriously and hard. His mother and father have prayed for him and with him. He has made sacrifices to reach this goal. Now the altar is before him and he repeats in the words of David's beautiful Psalm, "I shall go unto the altar of God, to God Who gives joy to my youth."

In his preparation for this great day, the young seminarian has received what are called Minor Orders. He has also been made first a Subdeacon, then a Deacon—an office which is mentioned often in the early Church and in the Scriptures.

Finally dawns the morning when he is to be made a priest.

The ceremonial for the Ordina-



tion of priests goes back into the shadows of the catacombs and beyond. The Acts of the Apostles tell of the Ordination of young priests; how the Apostles placed their hands upon the heads of their successors kneeling before them, called upon the Holy Spirit to fill their souls with power and

strength and commissioned them as officers in the army of the Lord and sent them forth to battle for the kingdom of God.

Until he has become a Subdeacon, the young man is completely free to leave the Seminary and return to his former life. Even as he approaches the final step, the Bishop demands whether he comes freely. He must answer with a completely voluntary "I am present and ready."

Just before their Ordination it is not extraordinary for some of the prospective priests to turn away. One may shrink from the heavy responsibilities of the priest's office, another may feel himself unworthy, while another might quite frankly confess that he realizes it would be too hard for him, day after day, to carry the

yoke of Christ and bear His Cross. When this decision is made, the young man leaves with the full permission of the Seminary authorities and his Bishop. He leaves without reproach and with the hope that he will lead an influential Christian life in some other profession.

With Ordination, however, a man takes upon himself a life's career.

Once ordained, he belongs forever to God in the service of the people.

As Christ says, he has put his hand to the plow and he must not turn back. He is a priest forever.

I remember my own Ordination with deep joy and gratitude. The beautiful church was filled with friends but chiefly with the relatives of the thirty young men ordained with me.

My mother and father and brother had come to see me become a priest. I had eaten a quiet and peaceful dinner with them the evening before on the verge of what they knew was to be the greatest event in my life.

On the morning of Ordination, in a room adjoining the main body of the church, I put on the vestments of the priesthood. The long white robe was as ancient as the Roman toga and the white garments worn by Jewish priests of the Old Law. Though many would think that I was throwing my life away in becoming a priest, I felt that I was putting on Christ as St. Paul begs us to do, and taking upon myself the beautiful life's work of one of Christ's priests.

The elderly Bishop who ordained me waited in the sanctuary of the church before the altar, surrounded by priests who had taught me in the Seminary. These priests were there as friends and well-wishers. Later on, they would put their priestly hands upon my head, to symbolize the long connected chain by which all priests are linked together back to Christ at the Last Supper and even to the Jewish priests of the Old Law. In addition, they watched every detail of the ceremony so that everything might be done with perfect exactness.

For from Christ right down to our own group, through the hands of twenty centuries of priests, the delegated power of Christ was to come to me. "You have not chosen Me but I have chosen you," Christ said. I was not taking this upon myself; St. Paul had warned against such arrogance. I was kneeling humbly to receive the power that in unbroken flow has passed through 1900 years of priests from the Apostles down to my class of young men who were being ordained.

The ordination itself is a beautiful ceremony.

Even dramatically you can feel the meaning of the action as it moves forward.

We knelt in a half circle about the altar. The events came rapidly one upon the other.

First came the inquiry as to our worthiness. The assistant to the ordaining Bishop requested in the name of the Church that we be ordained to the office of the priesthood. The Bishop asked, "Do

you know them to be worthy?"

His assistant answered: "As far as human frailty allows to know, I know and I testify that they are worthy of the charge of this office."

Then the Bishop addressed the clergy and people assembled: "Dearly beloved brethren, the captain of a ship as well as the passengers are in the same condition as to safety or danger. Their cause is common, therefore they ought to be of the same mind. Indeed, not without reason did the Fathers ordain that in the election of candidates for the service of the altar the people also should be consulted. For it happens here and there that, as to the life and conduct of a candidate, some few know what is unknown to the majority. Necessarily, also, people will render obedience more readily to the ordained if they have consented to his Ordination.

"Now with the help of the Lord these deacons are to be ordained priests. As far as I can judge, their life has been of approved goodness and pleasing to God, and, in my opinion, merits for them promotion to a higher ecclesiastical honor. However, lest one or a few be mistaken in their judgment, or deceived by affection, we must hear the opinion of many. Therefore, whatsoever you know about their lives or character, whatsoever you think of their worthiness, freely make it known. Testify as to their fitness for the priesthood according to merit rather than according to affection. If anyone has anything against them, before God and for

the sake of God, let him confidently come forth and speak . . ."

Then after a pause, the Bishop addressed us who were to be ordained: "Dearly beloved Sons, you are about to be ordained to the order of the priesthood. Strive to receive it worthily, and after having received it, to perform its duties in a praiseworthy manner.

"The office of the priest is to offer sacrifice, to bless, to govern, to preach, and to baptize. Truly it must be with great fear that you ascend to so high a station; and care must be taken that heavenly wisdom, irreproachable character, and long-continued righteousness shall command the candidate's chosen future. It is for this reason that the Lord, when commanding Moses to select from the whole people of Israel seventy men to assist him, and to impart to them a share in the gifts of the Holy Spirit, added this direction: Take whom thou knowest to be elders to the people. Now you have been typified by these seventy elders; if, assisted by the seven gifts of the Spirit, you observe the Ten Commandments of the law, and prove yourself to be worthy, mature in mind and likewise in works.

"Under the same mystery and figure, the Lord chose in the New Testament seventy-two disciples whom He sent, two by two, to go before Him preaching. Thus He wished to teach by word and deed that the ministers of His Church should be perfect in faith and practice, in other words, that they should be well-grounded in the twofold love, namely the love of

God and the neighbor.

"Therefore endeavor to be such that, by the grace of God, you may be worthy to be chosen as helpers of Moses and the twelve Apostles, that is, the Catholic Bishops who are signified by Moses and the twelve Apostles. Truly wonderful is the variety with which Holy Church is endowed, adorned, and governed. Its ministers are men ordained to various orders, some Bishops, others inferior in rank, priests and deacons and subdeacons; and out of many members distinguished as to dignity the one Body of Christ is formed.

"Therefore, dearly beloved sons, chosen by our brethren to be our helpers in the ministry, maintain in your department inviolate purity and holiness of life. Understand what you do, imitate what you administer. Inasmuch as you celebrate the mystery of the death of the Lord, you should endeavor to mortify in your members all sin and concupiscence. Let your preaching be a spiritual medicine for the people of God and the sweet odor of your holy lives a delight for the Church of Christ. May you thus build up, by word and example, the House, that is the family of God, so that your promotion to and reception of so great an office may not be either for you or for us a cause of damnation, but rather of reward. May He by His grace grant it to us."

Then the Bishop and all present prayed for us. And the final prayer was that of the Bishop: "Let us pray, dearly beloved brethren, to God, the Father Almighty, that He

may multiply heavenly gifts upon these His servants whom He has chosen for the office of the priesthood. May they by His help accomplish what they undertake at His gracious call through Christ Our Lord."

Turning to us, as we knelt before him the Bishop prayed again: "Hear us we beseech Thee, Lord Our God, and pour out upon these Thy servants the blessing of the Holy Spirit and the power of priestly grace. Sustain them forever with the bounty of Thy gifts whom we present to Thy mercy to be consecrated. Through Our Lord Jesus Christ, Thy Son, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee in the unity of the same Holy Ghost, God, forever and ever . . .

"... We beseech Thee, O Lord, give also to us help in our infirmity; we need it so much . . . as our weakness is so much greater. We beseech Thee, the Almighty Father, invest these Thy servants with the dignity of the priesthood. Do Thou renew in their hearts the spirit of holiness, that they may hold the office, the second as to importance, which they have received from Thee, O Lord, and by the example of their lives point out a norm of conduct. May they be watchful fellow laborers of our Order; may the pattern of all justice shine forth in them so that, when they will give a good account of the stewardship entrusted to them, they may receive the reward of eternal happiness."

Then we were dressed in the priestly vestments which we carried upon our arm and we were

charged as we did so by the Bishop with these words: "Receive the yoke of the Lord, for His yoke is sweet and His burden light... receive the priestly vestment, by which charity is signified; for God is powerful to increase unto their charity and perfect service."

I then held out my hands which the Bishop anointed with oil and wrapped them carefully in new linen. The oil set them apart for the high responsibilities of my priestly work.

During this anointing the Bishop prayed: "Vouchsafe, O Lord, to consecrate and sanctify these hands by this our anointing and our blessing... that whatsoever they shall bless, may be blessed, and whatsoever they shall consecrate be consecrated and sanctified..."

I was entrusted with the altar vessels — a chalice filled with wine and a little water and a small golden dish holding the unconsecrated bread which I would henceforth use at the altar. And the Bishop prayed: "Receive the power to offer sacrifice to God and to celebrate Mass for the living as well as for the dead, in the name of the Lord."

I was thus being consecrated to God and the service of souls.

I was being marked with the sign of the Cross.

The very heart of the Ordination was silent and almost like the imparting of a great secret.

I had knelt before the Bishop and on my head he placed his hands. This was no light and casual gesture. His old hands, gnarled with the labors of a lifetime,

seemed to press into my head. He made them deliberately heavy, for those hands came to me laden with the history of the ages. The gesture he made, St. Peter had made, and St. James and St. Paul when they sent their young successors out to labor and to die for Christ.

His hands were heavy with the Holy Spirit.

For he knew and I deeply believed that the Holy Spirit was coming to me. "Receive ye the Holy Spirit," Christ had said to His disciples. And that same Holy Spirit they also had passed on to their successors who had knelt before them to receive the priesthood.

The Bishop's hands were heavy with the powers Christ had given to His selected disciples. I was ordered to forgive sins. "Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them..." I was commanded to take the bread and wine and offer them in the sublime Sacrifice of the Mass. "This is My Body... this is My Blood... Do this in remembrance of Me." I was now obliged to raise my hands in the gesture of an official teacher.

When the hands of the Bishop were lifted from my head, one after another the priests who filled the church walked by and each of them rested his priestly hands upon my head.

I could almost seem to feel the flow of the grace of their priestly power into my young soul. Generation upon generation long past were centered in that moment, when to me, a new priest, was entrusted the same high dignity that had belonged to the priests of the

Old and the New Law. Now their wonderful office was mine.

Undeserving, I had been lifted by my office to be an instrument of Almighty God — an office which placed me at the head of my people before God.

From that moment onward I must spend my life begging God to return to His People and by my official acts making possible His return.

Now I must reach down and lift my people close to God.

The tremendous responsibilities of this office made me shudder then as I shudder now with the continual experience of my own personal unworthiness. But I knew then as I know now that God willed to come to His people and would use even me, an unworthy priest, for His own high desire. I knew, too, that the inner hunger of the people was for God and they would accept my priesthood; however imperfectly I would exercise it — especially if by my personal life and my work as a priest I could lift them closer to their God.

The Bishop had turned back and faced the altar because it was time now for the completion of the Ordination Mass.

My voice and the voices of my associates around me, now priests like myself, joined with the Bishop as he offered the sacrifice.

Together all of us offered to God the bread and wine.

Together we spoke the glorious words that Christ has ordained: "This is My Body, this is My Blood." The Son of God visited His people.

Together we begged Him to come to our hearts and the hearts of the people we loved. It was the awesome moment of Holy Communion.

The Ordination Mass was ended; the Bishop left the sanctuary and we turned to the waiting church. There at the railing which separated the sanctuary from the rest of the church, knelt my mother and father. I moved toward them and made the sign of the Cross over their bowed heads with my freshly anointed hands. They, my best beloved, were the first I served in the joy of my priesthood.

Then the railing was crowded with people who came to be blessed by God through His new priests.

I was a priest forever and I cannot find the words to tell you of my joy.

"The practical solution of the question of vocation is this: Any boy or man who desires to be a priest and feels that he has the necessary qualifications should pray fervently and frequently to the Almighty that he may reach this goal; and if it is conducive to God's glory and to his own spiritual advantage, divine Providence will open the way to him. He should, moreover, seek the advice of a pious and experienced priest."

# "BUT CHRIST ALONE IS OUR PRIEST!"



This is the claim of those who say that they have no need for anyone to come between them and God. "I go straight to God for everything," they say.

Now when it is closely considered, this claim is singularly untrue . . . any way you want to look at it.

God has a plan, a most discernible plan, which runs through the universe: All things come to us from God as their ultimate Source; but most things come to us also through some created agency or in connection with its activity.

God made that His way of running His universe.

No one can deny that God acts constantly through human agents.

Between us and God are a multitude of people, who are in reality God's deputies, who serve us in His name and under Him. All things come from God; but they come from God through the busy, professional, trained or untrained hands of our fellowmen.

God is the Creator of all the food we eat.

Yet except for the rare and exceptional cases like Manna in the desert, all food comes to us through

the vast system of the material universe and from such human agents as the farmer, the herdsman, the chef and the baker.

God is the source of all truth.

But except for the rare, inspired prophets of ancient days, all truth comes to us from God through such

human sources of truth as our parents, teachers, writers, newspaper editors, friends, educators and literary experts.

We pray God for health and thank Him when He has blessed us with bodily strength.

Yet our health would be in a bad way if we did not use the means God has put at our disposal of being strong and staying well: the inherited health and generous care of our parents, the right food from those who provide it, our doctors, hospitals, chemists and nurses.

Even our very life itself comes to us from God with the cooperation of His creatures.

God is the author of life. Yet He uses our parents in giving us life. Had they not cooperated with Him, we should not have been



conceived or brought forth into the world. Life came from God to us only when our parents loved, married, and begot our infant life according to His plan.

So to say that one gets everything directly from God is sheer nonsense.

Indeed the normal way we get everything in God's present plan is through human beings.

Even God Himself and His Grace.

If you believe in God, He did not teach you directly about Himself. He taught you through your parents, through Christ and His Apostles, through His Holy Book which was brought into existence by a variety of divinely inspired but still human writers, and through His Church.

So to reject the fact and the work of priests in Christianity is to say: In only one place and at one time does God act directly and without a human intermediary — when it comes to religion. Where in the Bible does anyone get such an idea? As a matter of fact, the Bible is a long history of the way in which human beings lead other human beings to God. You will find there that God is constantly choosing men and women to act as His messengers, to lead His people to Him. He listens to the voices of the saints of the Old Law. They can win His favor as others cannot. He Himself does not directly lead His people. He chooses men and women to lead His people in His place.

The whole Old Testament, rightly dear to Christian hearts, is the

record of men and women, notably ordained priests chosen by God, who stand between Him and the people. They pray for the people. They offer sacrifices for the people. They do the appointed things which win His favor for the people. They teach the people. They lead the people up to God Who waits for their love and service.

As a Catholic priest, I am deeply aware of the priesthood of Jesus Christ.

Indeed, in Him I see the full and perfect priest.

To me as a Catholic, as a Christian who accepts the full and perfect Christ, Christ is a priest by the very force of His nature.

A priest by virtue of his office and his professional character and work is, please remember, a man who stands as a representative of God to the people and the people's representative before God. He draws God down to the people and the people up to God.

How perfectly, then, how fully, and how really Jesus Christ is a priest!

I believe that Jesus Christ is true God and true man.

I believe that in the person of the Saviour is the perfection of the Divinity and all the attributes of our humanity.

So in Jesus Christ you have the complete priest.

In His own Divine person, He unites the nature of God and the nature of man.

Actually, at the moment when the eternal Son of God became man, God came to the earth and

lifted human nature to a union with Himself.

Throughout His life, Christ was the priest, the full and perfect priest, for in the person of the Saviour was united the God of Heaven and the Son of Man.

Then, in the sublime moments of His priestly office, Christ acted the full part of a priest.

At the Last Supper, He fulfilled perfectly the priestly function of the Father of the Family. He offered the Paschal lamb and gave it to His Apostles. Then He moved forward to the glorious Sacrifice of the New Law. He first offered to God the bread and wine which are the ancient symbols of life. He then spoke the clear declaration of fact: "This is my body... this is my blood;" and He separately offered His Body and Blood to God in unbloody sacrifice, a full and sublime gift.

Closely following the Lord's Supper on Thursday night, came the Sacrifice of His life on Calvary the next day.

Christ our High Priest mounts the altar of the Cross. There He stands the perfect priest. In His Divine person He has united both God and man.

Now as our great High Priest He makes His offering to God. He presents His guiltless life to His Heavenly Father.

Because He is man, His suffering and death can atone for our human sins and failings.

Because He is God, what He does is of infinite value, acceptable to the infinite God.

The life He freely offers is His

own. He Who offers that life is our representative and yet our God.

So Christ's death on the Cross was not merely the unselfish act of a great and good man, but the supreme Sacrifice of our High Priest for all ages.

In Him all the bloody foreshadowing figures of the Old Law and its sacrifices are fulfilled. John the Baptist had called Him the Lamb of God. Now that Lamb, favorite victim of all sacrifices, is sacrificed for our sake.

I believe that Jesus Christ is the perfect, the principal and unique priest of all time and, as such, He could have no successors.

I accept all that St. Paul writes so glowingly of Him in his Epistle to the Hebrews.

This is, indeed, our great High Priest.

I not only believe this, but I know exactly why I believe it.

But does that mean, because we have one High Priest, that with Him all sacrifice has ceased? Did Christ intend that His religion would be a religion with one historic Sacrifice fading into the distant past? Was Christianity to be content with the memory of a great Gift only once given to God? Was the day of Good Friday to have Christendom's one and only Sacrifice? And was there to be no priest once Christ had functioned as our High Priest?

Christ said Himself that He came not to destroy but to fulfill.

At the Last Supper, once He had perfected the sacrifice of the Paschal lamb and given in its place the Sacrifice of Himself

under the appearances of bread and wine, He gave an instant command to His Apostles: "Do this in remembrance of me!"

The offering of the bread and wine which He had made, they too were to make.

The consecration of the bread and wine into His Body and Blood was now to be their office as His delegates and as the instruments of His Divine power. And they were now to offer Him under the appearances of bread and wine to the Heavenly Father.

The Jewish priesthood was perfected in the Christian priesthood, and the religious functions which, by the command of God, the Jewish priests did in a preparatory fashion, the Christian priests instantly began to do in the perfect, Christ-ordained fashion.

History takes over instantly.

Christian priests, as the ambassadors of God and the dispensers of His mysteries, at once begin to function.

They stand between God and the people, these Apostles. They carry on the mission of Christ reconciling God and His people.

They teach as priests. They forgive sins by Divine command. Everywhere they perform the Sacrifice of the Last Supper.

So from the very foundations of Christendom, we have the Christian priest.

He looks upon himself as doing what Christ has commanded. So also do his people.

He is commissioned to carry forward the work of Christ, the great High Priest. What he does is

merely what Christ commanded:

"Do this" with the bread and wine.

"Forgive sins" in the name and with the power of Christ.

"Go teach" in obedience to the voice that said, "He who hears you, hears me."

It would take far more space than a small booklet affords to explain all this fully. I can give here merely an explanation and not the proofs which many inquiring minds demand. It is difficult in itself to give an explanation, so let me put it personally.

I am a priest because in the plan of God, human instruments serve God's people in everything. He gives food, clothing, knowledge and even religion through my fellowmen. Yes, He gives even Himself.

I do not believe that Christendom had only one Priest long since ascended into Heaven, Who performed one Sacrifice and then left the people without a daily gift to give to their God. I believe that the perfect religion which is Christ's has a sublime High Priest, the Saviour. It also has a living, a daily Sacrifice, and living priests ordained to offer it.

When I go to the altar to offer that Sacrifice, I go as the agent and representative of Christ. It is only in that way that I share in His priesthood. I believe that in what we call the Mass, the re-enactment of the Last Supper, Christ Himself is as He was on Calvary and at the Last Supper, the great High Priest. I am merely a human agent to whom His priest-

hood has been delegated, doing what He commanded, so that His great Sacrifice can be the daily gift offered by mankind to God and the gift of redemption and grace from God to His people.

I know that I can only do this as the instrument of God.

I am fully aware that it is my obligation to draw the people not to myself but to Jesus Christ.

I am the dependent, delegated, weak and fallible priest; He the unique and perfect priest. Yet since He has entrusted the management of His kingdom to human beings like myself, He has given me the blessed privilege and office of functioning as His priest in His name and through His power.

If God has ordained that you go to a doctor for the maintenance and restoration of your health—though all the time you pray to Him to inspire and guide the doctor...

If you employ a lawyer to gain justice for you—though you ask God to give wisdom to the judge...

If you thank God for your food—and yet buy it from your grocer and eat what has been prepared by your cook...

If you gain knowledge through a thousand human agencies—though you know God is the ultimate source of truth...

Then I believe it is simple logic to say: God has intended us to have human agents who professionally present His gifts to us and who represent us before Him. It

is all part of His wonderful plan of allowing free human beings the actual management of the world and His kingdom on earth. He owns the world. We are His stewards. He gives us all things; but these things come to us through the ministrations of those who serve us in a thousand different ways.

I know that Jesus Christ is the great and supreme High Priest.

But He graciously allows me to act in His name as His visible priest before the people.

For He wants them to have a visible as well as an invisible priest.

He wants the Sacrifice of Christians not to be one Sacrifice nineteen centuries removed, but one Redeeming Sacrifice that is made available to the people every day and in every place.

He did not end the priesthood once and for all by His own perfect priestly character, but set the standard of what His Christian priests should be.

This is what historic Christianity always has believed.

This is the desire of the human heart...the answer to the aspirations of human nature.

Christ definitely and in clear words raised men to an office between the people and God and delegated to them the power to teach with truth, to forgive sins, to do wonderful things with bread and wine.

This I do today because I am a priest of Christ.

# WHAT DOES A CATHOLIC PRIEST DO?

"Being a Catholic priest must be a pretty plushy job. What does a priest do anyhow to deserve the support that his people give him?" That's a large question, so I have to answer it in some detail.

Let's take the day of an average priest, almost any priest.

He rises somewhere between six and seven, depending on the hour of the Mass he is saying in the parish church or chapel.

He is expected by the Church to put in at least a half hour in personal prayer. This he owes to God and to his own soul. Usually this is called mental prayer, prayer spent thinking about some incident in the Gospel, about some characteristic of Christ, about his own duties and privileges for which he owes God so deep a gratitude, about the needs of his people, and what he can do to meet them.

He then goes to the altar and says Mass.

As a priest, I regard this as my greatest work of the day. I offer to God, as He commanded me, a triple gift:

The gift of bread and wine, the



ancient symbols of Christ Himself;

The gift of myself and perfect God and perfect man under the appearances of bread and wine;

The gift of myself and God's people united with the Saviour and dedicated to His glory.

In return, God gives me and the people Christ Jesus in the wonderful union we call Holy Communion.

I offer the Mass with distinct intentions in mind: for peace for the world, strength and success for the living, for the salvation of sinners and the increase of saints, for God's blessing on all mankind, for all those things which men and women must have if they are to know God's will and do it.

More than that, I believe that through the Mass I open the door by which Jesus Christ visits His world. Communists hate priests; so do all those who hate Jesus Christ. By some sort of diabolical intuition they know that when they say Mass priests bring Christ into His world and close to His people. They feel that if they can stop the Mass, they can separate Christ

from His people. So they strike at the priests as a means of putting an end to the Mass.

Following the Mass, a priest often brings Christ under the appearances of bread in Holy Communion to the sick and shut-ins of his parish. He goes from house to house, bringing Christ with him. As the man with the Roman collar drives past you on your way to work, the chances are that he may be bringing Jesus Christ in the Eucharist to the old, the bedridden, the sick, the dying.

Often enough before Mass or after, there are people who wish to go to Confession. Confession is the priest's way of fulfilling the command of Christ to forgive sins and the way for Christians to seek forgiveness for their sins. Beyond this matter of forgiving sins with the power of Christ, Confession is an opportunity for Catholics to seek advice, lay their personal problems before an objective and trained adviser, and get the help they need for the confused and difficult living which we all experience.

Breakfast in a priest's rectory is usually hurried; for the calls upon his time begin early. His day is punctuated by numerous phone calls, by trips to the study or office, by the ringing of the doorbell. Priests are a magnet for beggars, for those in spiritual or mental distress, for saints, for sinners, for plain people — and for bores. A priest early learns to listen, so he listens, gives of his slender income in charity and of his store of carefully acquired knowledge and experience in direction.

It is now very common for a priest to teach religion to the boys and girls in the parish school. Or he may be teaching Latin or science or literature in a Catholic high school or college.

After his parish duties many a modern priest heads for one of the important diocesan offices; which means that he may be the editor of a religious paper, a director of a city's Catholic charities, the superintendent of a Catholic school, or in charge of the office which collects funds necessary for sustaining missionaries here at home and in far countries.

If he is not doing this, he is engaged in a thousand duties connected with the management and maintenance of a Catholic parish. For a Catholic parish is not just a church open on Sunday mornings and perhaps two nights a week; it is a church open from sunrise until late at night; a full size grammar school with possibly a high school; a center for a variety of Catholic organizations; perhaps a social or youth center. All these things need constant attention, supervision, and actual physical work.

Many a city parish has a hospital within its boundaries. Whether this is a Catholic hospital or not, the priest visits those who wish to see him, and makes it a point to see if he can locate and call on those who might in some way profit by his visit, his advice, his immediate help, and the priestly powers that are his.

Connected with every Catholic church are a variety of activities —

societies for both boys and girls; societies for men and women and married couples; societies devoted to particular works of charity, instruction, recreation, missions, co-operatives, and so on. The priest is responsible for at least a personal interest in these activities and societies and their meetings are always time consumers.

If he is building, the priest must see and consult his superintendent. If he is repairing, as he almost constantly is, he has to give time to bids and contracts, to checks and rechecks on work planned and work in progress.

As an educated man, he needs time for personal study and reading. Each Sunday he has his sermon to deliver and usually during the week he has some talks to give. Good sermons do not happen by wishing them into existence. They take careful study and preparation.

Afternoons can be busy times. Usually most priests try to take off one afternoon a week to visit their parents, to play a little golf or tennis, to do personal shopping, to read in undisturbed quiet, to pursue some hobby like photography or stamp collecting. If they actually get such an afternoon, they regard themselves as in rare luck.

The other afternoons are a constant round of calls to the office; people coming to arrange for marriages and funerals and baptisms, mothers coming with their children for advice, married people with their problems, unmarried people coming to talk over their futures. During the afternoons, the Con-

fessions of children are heard and usually, once a week, the priest hears the Confessions of the nuns in a neighboring convent.

After dinner the average pastor's evenings are full.

Two or three nights a week, there may be church services.

Almost every evening some society has a meeting, some committee calls for his attention, some club is in session.

In the evening he usually instructs those who seek information about the Catholic Church. A young lady may bring the young man who wants to marry her and who must be told what it means to marry a Catholic.

The prospective convert has to be instructed in the complete outline of Catholic Faith and practice. The mere inquirer must be received with courtesy and consideration.

Then in intervals throughout the day, the priest makes his parish rounds. He visits the sick. He drops in on the bedridden. He may visit a new parishioner, in fact there are a wide variety of reasons why he must make the opportunity of visiting these people.

Many a priest in addition to all this may now and then be called to serve as a luncheon speaker at a noonday club, the chaplain of a Legion Post, or in charge of Boy Scouts.

But to sum up what may seem to be a tiresome catalogue of routine duties, a good priest tries to be all things to all men.

He is a public servant, and his people so regard him. He has little enough privacy and small periods

of uninterrupted time.

He is obliged by his vows to give freely what he has freely received from God.

His people call him "Father" for in a spiritual and religious sense he must often act as the father of a family which constantly demands his help in recurring difficulties and which would share with him their joys and their successes.

But he is most the priest when he mounts the altar and the pulpit.

He feels his priesthood deeply as he sits in the darkness of the confessional and sinners come to him for peace of mind and soul.

He loves to raise Christ under the appearance of bread to bless his people in Benediction. He is pleased when a small boy stops

him with an invitation, "Come, watch us play ball, Father."

He smiles on the lady who holds out her rosary for him to bless.

He is wonderfully happy when he pours the water in Baptism over a little infant head, when he blesses the joined hands of a young couple in marriage, when he welcomes to his parish one of "his boys" who has been away at the Seminary and now returns a young priest full of zeal.

It is a busy life, but it is, as far as human zeal and faith can make it, involved in God's business... my Father's business.

And that is why a good priest is a happy man.

I certainly think he is a useful one.

"We often hear the expression 'a vocation to the priesthood.' Does this mean that God chooses only a few boys whom He wishes to be priests and to them alone imparts the requisite abilities and graces? This is the idea of a priestly vocation proposed by some theologians and spiritual writers. Others, however, attribute more concurrence to the individuals themselves. They believe that the Almighty has endowed many boys with the requirements for the priesthood, and any one of them can be said to have a vocation if he himself is willing to give his life unselfishly to the work of the ministry and to practice the virtues required of a priest. However, it must always be remembered that the priesthood is directed to the benefit of the Church rather than of the priest himself, and no man, however holy or talented he may be, or however ardently he may desire the priesthood, receives the final element of a priestly vocation until he has been invited to receive Holy Orders by an official of the Church — that is, a bishop or, in the case of a religious, his superior."



# God Really Comes First

Christ gave the world two great commandments:

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole mind and heart and soul and strength.

Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

In a self-styled practical age, many a man and woman is content to be trying to keep only the second commandment. The Catholic priest is convinced that he must try with all his human powers and the grace of God to keep them both.

"Why don't you priests marry?" I have been asked a hundred times in the course of my life.

One hesitates to put it bluntly for the true ideal sounds, perhaps, too humanly ambitious. Yet it is God's simple command to love Him and I should like to think I am trying my best to observe His law.

"We do not marry because we want to love the Lord our God with our whole heart, mind and strength. We try to give God not a divided, but an undivided heart." That could be our answer.

St. Paul, whom virtually all Christians regard as a saint, was a priest who never married. He



explained why he did not. When a man is married, he told the early Christians, he is worried about what his wife needs and thinks and wants. But when he is not married, he can devote himself entirely to God and the things which God wants. He can serve God with an undivided love.

A Catholic Bishop wears a ring as a symbol that he is wedded to his diocese. A Catholic priest does not wear a ring, but he is supposed to be wedded wholeheartedly to his people and to the cause of God Whom he serves.

So from the very first days of his early training, a Catholic priest is challenged to love God.

He is reminded that God is His generous and loving Father.

From personal experience he knows the greatness of God's gifts to him.

He makes a lifelong study of the person of Jesus Christ, true God and true man, and most attractive of the sons of men. The priest is asked to make God's business his whole concern and to have no other major interest.

Daily he talks with God in

prayer.

Daily in the Mass he is in closest association with the Divine Saviour.

He knows that God has made him His personal steward, a sort of minor partner in the management of His kingdom.

He must not let love of family or power or wealth or position interfere. He must love God the Father and the Saviour Christ Jesus as They have loved the children of men.

So He is taught to think of everything in terms of God and His kingdom.

Priests are often accused of being narrow-minded. It would be better to say that a good priest is consistent. Certainly he is not broad-minded in the sense that he is willing to let those go unchallenged who think that adultery is an excusable sideline for a millionaire, that rotten entertainment won't do irreparable harm to small children, or that exploiting the poor is not an unlawful way of gaining entrance to a country club.

Christ was not a broad-minded person in that sense. For Him truth was truth and good was good. He had small patience with the Pharisees and sin was a horrible thing that had to be uprooted at all cost.

So if a priest is consistent, he has to think with the mind and see with the eyes of Christ.

That may make him appear narrow-minded to many; but I don't think the Pharisees and Sadducees found Christ particularly tolerant of their trickery and hypocrisy.

Christ emphasized His Father's business. He loved His Father and all that concerned His Father's kingdom on earth. He hated whatever upset God's plan and made the work of God appear to fail in the eyes of men. For that, they killed Him.

I should exaggerate if I suggested we priests all succeed splendidly in loving God; I should be lacking in humility if I said we are as consistent in opposing sin as Christ Himself was.

But I do claim that we are expected to do just that.

We promised God that we would love Him.

We promised to give our whole life to Him and to His work.

Before all else, we are expected to serve Him and to give Him our minds, our hearts, our hands.

Each day we are required by the Church to spend about one full hour praying to God, using the official prayer which is called the Divine Office. Out of the Psalms of David and all the great prayers of the Old and New Testament, the sermons and the deeds of Christ, the shining achievement of the Apostles and saints, the Church has compiled one of the world's great books. It is at once a prayer-book, a guide to the love of God, a record of glorious lives of men and women who have loved and served God, the cream of the Scriptures, the lofty thoughts of those who have known God most intimately and served Him most perfectly.

One hour each day of his life, the priest reads and prays and

meditates in saying the Divine Office.

A priest may miss his annual vacation for there is no Church law that protects and guarantees him a holiday. But there is a Church law that does insist that each year the priest retire from all his normal activities, go to a quiet place, and spend a full five to seven days with God in what is called a Retreat.

Usually under the guidance of an older priest, experienced in the spiritual life and practiced in prayer and the love and service of God, he walks in silence, prays and thinks, looks back at the mistakes and shortcomings of the year and plans for the year to come.

The efforts of his spiritual guides in the seminary were to train him to think as saints are supposed to think. Each day of his priestly life is expected to throw him in closer association with the Saviour.

Yet for about a week, he is ordered to walk with God, to think entirely of God and his own soul, and to come back to his work ready to serve God with fresh enthusiasm and zeal.

The good priest has one sole ambition — to become as much like Jesus Christ as possible.

The zealous priest is rightly ambitious to love God and serve Him well.

Like all frail mortals, he fails often; the goal is high and the ideals are almost frighteningly splendid. He knows his own sins and when it is possible, once a week he kneels before another priest and confesses them as all Catholics must confess their sins. He is expected constantly to keep reading the Scriptures and those spiritual books which will help make his life finer and more like the life of Christ. He knows how far short he falls of the ideal; but he knows that the ideal is always there and he is expected by God, the Church, his fellow priests and the people to come as close to reproducing in himself the image of the Saviour as he possibly can.

The Church holds in disdain worldly and selfish and sinful priests.

The Church demands that he keep Christ in the center of his life and make God his only love and God's work his sole ambition.

He must not forget that the first and greatest commandment given to the world by Christ the Priest is this: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole mind and heart and soul and strength."

If he is a true priest, that is the first and great rule of his personal life, his official occupation, and his constant striving.

# "ALL GOD'S CHILDREN ARE MINE!"

Christ had no illusions about the difficulty of the second commandment: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

One hears a surprising number of people say in a careless way: "I may not be very religious; but I try to practice the Golden Rule."

Christ was wiser than that. He knew the only way to love one's neighbor was first to love God. Should it be difficult to love God? He is all-good, generous, kind and merciful, all-just, and beautiful. God has been wondrously generous to us. God is our Father, our Saviour, our Holy Spirit of love and light.

Really loving God presents little difficulty.

Loving one's neighbor? Ah, there's a quite different matter.

I may love those who are good or sympathetic. I may be fond of those who are fond of me. I may find attractive people attractive, and be kind to kind people, and generous with the generous. I like the intelligence of people who find me intelligent. I am grateful for the gracious and enjoy giving to those who appreciate my gifts.



But these make a rather small circle of people in the lives of most of us.

What about those who rub me the wrong way?

What about the uncouth and ungenerous, the stupid and the boresome?

What about those who accept my favors without thanks and who never think

of giving me a gift of any sort?

What about the people of other races and different colors, people whose manners are rough and even whose company I find repulsive?

What about my enemies? What about the Samaritans of all generations?

As a priest of God, perhaps I am in a strange situation. I have a double obligation. I must not give my love to any one person but I must love everybody. I cannot attach myself to any family, my own or another's; yet I must regard as my children all those who call me "Father" as well as those who turn away from me in distrust and dislike.

I must prize holiness wherever I find it and yet I must be gentle and merciful with sinners.

I must strive for a Christ-like

perfection in myself and always be considerate of the imperfect whoever they may be.

I cannot bind myself to anyone; yet I must let the poor and the needy, the young and the unstable cling to me.

I must find, in God my sole support; and in turn I must be the support of those who call upon me for help.

I must love my neighbor as myself. Indeed, in some ways, as a priest I must love God's children more than myself.

It is a difficult commandment which makes for a difficult life. Yet Christ expects me, his priest, to obey that law with the best possible approach to the perfection that He Himself showed.

So I sit in the confessional while sinners pour out the stories of their evil lives. I must wait patiently while the garrulous repeat over and over their trifling faults. I must listen without a smile to the tiny faults of the child and hear without wincing the lurid account of a life of crime.

As a priest I am expected to be all day long at the service of God's children. None of them is really mine; but they are all His and hence they are all my responsibility.

I cannot choose to serve only those whom I like; Christ didn't. The lepers are mine along with the gracious women of Bethany and the wise Nicodemus. I must give as freely to the ungrateful as to the grateful. I have to spend long hours with the scrupulous and plead with the stubborn. I am expected to be the teacher of those who

thirst for knowledge of the truth and of those who laugh at what I say and ridicule the mysteries of God's revelation.

I must go to the hospital and to the city jail if there are those who await me there. I must take the death walk with the condemned man even if I hear the mockery of the voices that shout: "He consorts with publicans and sinners." I cannot refuse my advice, the absolution of sins, or my service to anyone who comes sincerely demanding them. I must crawl under the wrecked car, enter the blazing hotel, or the gas-filled mine shaft; I cannot run away in time of plague and I must take the risk of infection when the eternal welfare of my people is at stake.

Again that is the reason why I am not a married man.

Like St. Paul I am expected to be all things to all men.

No personal ties, no home connections, no obligations to a wife or child can stand between me and my duty to God's children. I cannot hold back out of consideration either for my self or someone dear to me. Christ died for all, and I must live for all who need me.

Fortunately, my own life has been filled with wonderful people.

I have known the gracious and have been friends with the good. I have seen the innocence of the young and heard the wisdom of old age. I have benefited by the generosity of the kind and shared the labors of the zealous. My life has been a long catalogue of charming people, good people, holy people, people who showed me the very

best in their characters.

Yet as a priest I must serve all, without thought of their personal charm or lack of it.

The priest's parlor or office is the narrow gate through which pass all classes and all types.

The confessional knows saints and sinners, the ragged and the unwashed.

God's grace and forgiveness, Christ's Sacraments are for all, and I must bring them to all, give them to all.

I cannot consciously harbor dislike for those who dislike me and they are numerous enough in this age when priests are often distrusted and hated. I cannot take revenge on my enemies. I must forgive as He did.

In my mail comes at least my full share of letters from people who attack me, attack my Faith, hate my Church, smear my priesthood and tell me what crooks all priests are. I have to answer their letters as I think God would. And I try to.

I am not supposed to accumulate a personal fortune; I am supposed to think only in terms of winning people to God.

As a priest, I must think more highly of the quiet work in an unknown confessional than the

applauded appearance on a lecture platform or pulpit.

God loves the sinner and so must I.

God wants His grace showered upon every possible saint, and mine are the hands to take part in this.

The young need patience; a different sort of patience from that demanded by the old; God asks patience from me for both.

I am supposed to be the father of the poor, the teacher of the ignorant, the gentle corrector of the perverse, the guide of the troubled, the counselor of the distressed, the physician for the sick of soul, the firm support of the tottering and the tempted.

Am I all that?

God forgive me, I am far from what I should be.

But as a priest I know what God expects of me and the people rightly demand of me. Where I fail, I strike my breast in sorrow. When I can do my work for my people, it is my privilege, opportunity and honor.

Nothing human must be alien to me.

No cry should escape my ears.

Any hand outstretched should find mine outstretched in turn with ready assistance.

"Whatever trials the priest may have to undergo, he knows that our Lord is ever at his side, to comfort and to strengthen him. He has the assurance that the cause for which he is laboring will triumph in the end. Even though his individual efforts in the ministry may result in failure, the Church and the priesthood will endure forever, for it was to the Church and its priests that Christ gave the consoling promise: 'Behold, I am with you all days even to the consummation of the world' Matthew xxviii. 20)."

# "HE USED TO BE A PRIEST"



Every year a certain number of priests — remarkably few considering the thousands of priests in the world in spite of claims to the contrary — give up the practice of their priesthood and sometimes their Faith.

Frequently they are unfortunate men beset with some weakness. Whether they admit it or not, they leave the practice of their sacred profession with real regret. They often die with the grace of God in their hearts and a deep sorrow for the disgrace they have brought to the priesthood.

There are those who get into difficulties because of their faults and misconduct, who are turned out of their office and are the failures one finds in any profession demanding high integrity and faithful performance of duty.

Few ever hear of them. They are swallowed up in the silence they deliberately choose. God is merciful and He may remember their former courage, the bright light in their eyes as young priests, and the love and loyalty they once had shown.

However, there are also the

professional ex-priests who have become the enemies of the priesthood.

Once they loved the Church. Now for any of a thousand reasons they have come to hate it. Once they defended and taught the truth that is taught by the Church of Christ. Now they seem to have slight regard

for that truth in any form.

On occasion, they make a comfortable living slandering their former associates, building up gigantic fictions about the Church, or dragging out the human faults and failings that occur in any group of weak and sinful mortals, and make them the stock and trade of their public lectures and the books and pamphlets which they write.

Some priests simply lose their faith. St. Paul himself prayed that his friends beg God that while he preached to others, he himself might not become a castaway. God alone can judge the sincerity of priests whose faith is gone.

Some, as the poet Francis Thompson said, "read the Gospel light in some beautiful woman's eyes." They lose their faith after

they have lost their priestly morals.

And some of them make a trade of detraction, a science of slander, and a better than average living by holding their former profession and their rejected Church up to the laughter and ridicule of a shocked, pleased and slightly morbid audience.

To be a good priest and to continue in that difficult profession, a man needs to be humble. God despises the proud and casts down the mighty from their places. One cannot be a good priest if he places his own abilities above the gifts of God and his own will above God's law and his lawful religious superiors.

It is a notable fact that ministers from the Protestant Church and Rabbis who come from Judaism to the Catholic Church, love their new Faith with a deep affection; yet they speak with affection and wistfulness of the religions they have left. The Catholic Church does not want them to hate and revile what they have left; it would find vicious attacks on the morals of their former associates a poor defense of Catholic living. All decent Catholics would be shocked if these converts were to say and write things about their former Churches, fellow ministers or Rabbis which were filthy lies and obscene slanders.

Some priests who have left the Church wrote books attacking its teachings and practices. These books have been read and studied by Catholic priests and answered in calm, scholarly fashion.

But some priests who turned

from the Church and married despite their vow not to wed, have made a business of distortions, lies, and the most fantastic twisting of what they pretend to recall of their former lives.

Indignant people sometimes demand that the Church and the clergy do something about this. But what answer is there to a lie?

How can you combat attacks which are sheer fiction?

What defense is there against character assassination or the slandering of an entire profession or class of men?

Within the Church there are monasteries wherein ex-priests can retire to mend their broken lives. There is a special religious group of nuns who lead a very difficult and penitential life, they are called Carmelites. They dedicate themselves to prayer and the love of God, never leave their convents, sleep on plank beds, never eat meat, fast rigorously almost half of the year, and rise before dawn to pray for the world for which Christ died. But above all others they pray for fallen-away priests.

They offer up their love of the cross that the Crucified Saviour may forgive these men who have betrayed their high office.

They fast and pray that God will in the end grant them forgiveness and save their souls.

The Church has known the awful injuries done by men who turn from the priesthood to blacken the Church and who left the service of the altar to swing sledges against the altar and the tabernacle.



But the Church in the end seeks out and tries to save these fallen priests.

An extraordinary number of them quietly on their deathbeds make their Confession, repent of their lost vocations and the harm they have done to the Mystical Body of Christ, and die with another priest speaking hope at their side.

Even for Judas, Christ had words of friendship and the implied proffer of forgiveness. The Church has suffered frightfully from fallen priests who have been its bitterest enemies, but it loves them and mourns for them and rejoices when they as lost sheep, rather than lost shepherds, return to the fold of the Good Shepherd.

It always has seemed significant that the professional ex-priest has such deep hate for the Catholic Church. He seldom argues against Catholic truth, rather he hurls angry explosives to bomb it. He seldom reasons, but rather violently shouts accusations, calls names, blames the Church for the faults

and sins of individual members, builds a whole case out of the weakness and sins of a single character or mistaken individual.

You may well distrust the professional ex-priest. I doubt if Benedict Arnold had much good to say for the young America he once had saved. I am not inclined to think that Judas would have made a notable defender of Christ Whom he betrayed to death. The unfortunate, weak, simply sinful ex-priest is usually a silent man. The priest who leaves because of loss of faith is almost wistful as he speaks of what he has lost.

But the man who in pride refuses to obey; the priest who finds the life too hard and exacting, the renegade who makes a living traducing the things he once held sacred...

God forgive him. The Church does. We priests do. And in the end, we seek him out with extended arms, forgiveness waiting, and Christ in the Eucharist eager to be his escort through death into Life recaptured.

"Since Christ intended His Church to endure until the end of time, it is evident that He willed the priestly powers which He gave to the apostles to be passed on to other men. The apostles themselves realized this; and so we read that St. Paul communicated the same ministerial powers that he possessed to Timothy in Ephesus and to Titus in Crete. The ceremony by which this transmission of the priesthood was effected was the laying on of hands with a form of prayer, for the apostle admonished Timothy: "Neglect not the grace that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with imposition of the hands of the priesthood" (1 Timothy iv. 14). And it was understood that those on whom St. Paul had bestowed the priesthood would in turn impart it to other worthy men, for he counselled Timothy: 'Impose not hands lightly on any man' (1 Timothy v. 22)."

# "YOU'VE MET A HAPPY MAN"

So I am a Catholic priest. I am also a happy man.

No one forced or induced me to become a priest. It was the grace of God and my great good fortune that made my priesthood possible. As a priest, I am the heir of the ages; for every nation and race has had the human instinct and the Divine command to appoint priests. I am of their fellowship.

In me is continued the Jewish priesthood which has otherwise disappeared from the earth.

My High Priest as well as the High Priest of my people, is Christ the Saviour.

My priesthood is a fulfillment of His command to do as He had done.

Because the Church regards its priests as most important, I have enjoyed an exceptional education

and other opportunities.

In my life, I try to stand where by obligation I belong. It is my splendid and challenging duty to bring God to the people and the people to God.

By my office I must love the Lord my God with heart and soul and mind and strength.

In that office, I must serve my neighbor in the spirit and devotion of Christ.

I know my human limitations and I regret them.

But I know, too, my Divine responsibilities and opportunities and they make me humbly glad.

You have met through these pages a Catholic priest.

May I now invite you to meet a priest, your nearest priest, in person? He will be happy to know you. Perhaps you will be better off just for knowing him.



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