

Encouragement Encouragement

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Priests and Priestly People

THE HOST APOSTOLATE

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Each person who is a Baptised Christian has been called by God to serve Him and His people in a unique and different way. Each person experiences that call in an assortment of various fashions. They may come by a direct call – or by an understanding, a prompt from others, a choice based on experience or even by revelation through scripture that resonates in the heart and mind with a ‘Yes’. This is true of all callings but do you ever wonder why or how a man is called to be a priest? Of course this can be lived out by being a Diocesan priest, a religious – i.e. a Benedictine, Franciscan, Dominican, Carmelite, Passionist or any number of ways of being linked with an Ecclesial community or a Missionary. Yet every ‘call’ is different and spoken to the heart by Him who calls knowing the strengths and weaknesses of everyone.

In these times of seeming shortages of priests (although this varies in different parts of the world enormously) certainly in the West there are real concerns about the falling numbers of priests and those entering seminaries. There also seems to be a reluctance to speak of this issue as well as those who are ‘serving’ to speak of their call – and how it happened, what led them to take the decision and why. Sometimes the journey is complex and there are many twists and turns. Recently a priest shared his rather complex and exciting journey with us, through the various steps over a period of years, that he had to make and in each step God was guiding him. We listened enthralled and wanting to ask questions. A call is a gift and blessing. It is important to share it, not flippantly, or casually, but as the circumstances dictate and for the good of The Body, priestly people, as required for their journey.

I once asked a visiting priest whom we (my husband and I) were looking after for a few weeks, what made him choose to become Ordained and receive the Sacrament of Holy Orders. There was a long pause and I almost felt a little uncomfortable at being so bold and asking so directly. After a good many minutes he said quite simply, ‘because I wanted to help people, my people, to become Holy’. I thought this was both a beautiful and unusual answer. I thanked him for his honesty and integrity and pondered his reply. St. Paul shared his journey many times and refers to it often in his letters. I think it is important to both share it but also to look at what is

being asked of each person, for within the many forms of answers lies the nature of the call and its importance; not just for that person, but for us all.

If asked, the majority of people would probably put ‘saying/praying Mass’ as the central part of the priestly call. While this is true, I wonder how many truly appreciate what this call is – or requires. Some would define it as a duty or a regulation – what priests ‘do’... without a deeper appreciation of what lies beneath that action. Jesus died on the Cross and offered Himself as a Victim for our Salvation. He did what His Heavenly Father asked of Him – completely and fully. A priest is an Alter Christus – another Christ, who freely offers sacrifice on our behalf, and with us, to the Father. He becomes like Jesus, and in so doing becomes the link with the Trinity. His offering, as can be seen during Mass and in the Eucharistic Prayers, can be, and should be, appreciated. This central act is inherent in the rôle of the priest, not merely as a form of prayer, though it is that crucially, but as a call to live as Jesus did.

This vocation, or call, is therefore to live denouncing self and offering oneself to God in this resplendent way. This is an amazing and wonderful calling – not to be responded to lightly but that not only brings holiness to people but a sharing in that sacrifice and also to be able to be fed with the Body and Blood of Jesus as a pure Gift of the Father’s love for us. What an amazing act of love this is.

You may at this point be thinking that the priest does more than that. You may think of him as a listener, advisor, encourager. You may think of all the Sacraments he is called to administer, you may also know him as the one who proclaims the Gospel of Good News.... All of which are within his call. But central to all is what he is called to **BECOME**. He is enabled to do some of these things because of this. As people, we all fail and do not live up to our Baptismal calling as Priests, Prophets and Kings, the priest included by virtue of his humanity. The journey to priesthood starts at Baptism. God doesn’t choose perfect human beings but enables them to do the work He wants by bestowing appropriate gifts. We must always remember that all people need support and encouragement in their vocation and the priest no less than others, often forgotten as we make demands.

‘BAPTISM IS NOT JUST FOR BABIES BUT FOR LIFE...’

A SPECIAL PASTOR

‘HERE IS A RULE FOR EVERYDAY LIFE: DO NOT DO ANYTHING YOU CANNOT OFFER TO GOD...’

ST. JEAN VIANNEY

Crucial to a priestly calling is the act of bringing down God's Forgiveness to those in Confession, in the act of Reconciliation. It is one of the joys of this service to the people of God which also brings blessing to both priest and penitent. It epitomises the Mercy of God. Today this aspect is often forgotten, yet it is central to the call of priesthood – the priest as Servant King.

The call to priesthood is therefore not in isolation. The priest ministers to us – but we too minister to him. Have you ever considered what a blessing it is for the priest to be able to give absolution to someone? We all share in the priesthood of Jesus by virtue of Baptism. Do we throw this challenge out and teach our children to be open to God's call in this way, in whatever form it is to be fulfilled? Or, do we think, as one mother said, 'I would hate my son to become a priest and not marry' or yet another, 'It's just not worthwhile'. Of course, in some places and in different Rites both are permissible (Melkites, Maronites, Chaldean – all under Papal authority)... But the centrality of the call remains the same.

This, unbidden story, freely given is the story of one man's journey to priesthood, and there are many...

I arrived at the Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham on 25th of September this year. On that day a friend of mine from Middleton, Manchester, came with a large white van to pick me up from St. Claire's Church, Blakely, Manchester. Then I loaded up the van with lots of boxes and we made our way southwards.

But you could say that the journey to Walsingham began many years before in 1984... I remember finishing my shift in a fast food restaurant and returning home. I stopped in a park. There was a beautiful sunset, but it did not make me happy. I had lots of concerns weighing me down. I desired to do something more worthwhile with my life; I wanted a more fulfilling job; I wanted to move out from my parents' house and find my own place.

I sat down on a park bench and prayed that God would give me a prayer group, just like the one I attended at university. Amazingly, that prayer was answered very quickly. When I went to Mass on Sunday I was surprised to see a small notice in the parish newsletter saying that a prayer group would be starting next Wednesday. I joined the prayer group and attended every week for the next few years. Meeting helped develop my faith in many ways; reading Scripture; worshipping God; sharing my experiences with others. Three years after joining the prayer group I went on a pilgrimage to Medjugorje. The pilgrimage had a profound effect on my life. I experienced Our Lady in a very real way as the heavenly Mother. I found that on my return home I had the gift of praying the Rosary. I also felt now that my life could be very simple. I learned that I could entrust

*myself to Our Lady and hand myself over to her. In praying the Rosary each day I could do this. She would take care of my decisions if I handed myself over to her. I also felt that on that pilgrimage God was calling me to be a priest. I continued in the prayer group and later joined the Franciscan Friars and was ordained a priest in 2004. I have served in Franciscan parishes in Oxford, North Wales, Manchester and as a University Chaplain in Preston. I am now one of the Franciscan priests at the Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham. **Father John Delaney***

We are responsible for the shortage in priestly vocations. Do we pray enough for an increase? Do we encourage candidates to come forward – do we encourage those on their way? Do we understand the calling? Let us reflect and pray about this in Lent. Halina Holman



Pope Francis... Priesthood is a Gift

"Contemplating that heart, I renew my first love; the memory of that time when the Lord touched my soul and called me to follow him, the memory of the joy of having cast the nets of our life upon the sea of his Word. Never forget your first love. Never! Certainly, for priests, our relationship with Christ is intimately linked into the Eucharist. Through your ministry, the spiritual sacrifice of the faithful is made perfect for it is united to the sacrifice of Christ, which through your hands in the name of the whole of the Church is offered up in a bloodless way on the altar in the celebration of the holy mysteries. When you celebrate the Mass, understand, therefore, what you do....As priests, we cannot live without a vital, personal, authentic and solid relationship with Christ...."

Rome 09. 2019

St. Jean Vianney, Patron of Priests, pray for us.

Feasts Days in February

- 1st St Brigid of Ireland
- 2nd Sunday (4th O.T.) **Presentation of the Lord**
- 3rd St Blaise, 5th St Agatha
- 6th Ss. Paul Miki and Companions
- 9th **Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 10th St Scholastica
- 11th **Our Lady of Lourdes**
- 14th Ss. Cyril and Methodius, & St Valentine
- 16th **Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 17th Seven Servite Founders, 21st St. Peter Damien
- 22nd Chair of St. Peter, Apostle
- 23rd **Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 26th **Ash Wednesday**
- 27th St Gabriel, 28th St. Oswald

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