

"Priesthood 101"

During this *Year for Priests*

Pope Benedict XVI has proclaimed this the "Year for Priests"! This Year is meant to benefit our priests, but it is also meant to benefit us, the laity. Our priests give their lives for us—their lives are literally spent in service to us. Therefore, a Year dedicated for them is also for us.



During this special Year, treat yourself to some basic information about the priesthood—you'll be glad you did!

The Sacrament of Holy Orders

Ordination is the sacramental act that integrates a man into the order of bishops, presbyters, or deacons. When a man is ordained, he receives a gift of the Holy Spirit that **permits the exercise of a sacred power** for the service of the faithful. This sacred power comes only from Christ Himself through His Church.

The Whole Church is a Priestly People

Only Christ is the true priest.

Yet through our baptism, we all share in His priesthood.

There are 2 ways to participate in Christ's priesthood:

- the common (or baptismal) priesthood of the faithful
- the ministerial priesthood of bishops and priests.

The ministerial priesthood is at the service of the common priesthood. Priests' lives are literally spent in service to us. The Church states that the priest's office "is in the strict sense of the term a *service*." Priests exercise their service to us in 3 ways: by teaching, divine worship, & pastoral governance. The ministerial priesthood is one way Christ builds up and leads His Church ... thus every priest is a GIFT to us from God!

The Importance of the Priest as Spiritual Father

In the natural order, a man and woman are united in matrimony as bridegroom and bride. In the spiritual or supernatural order, Christ is the Bridegroom; His people (we, the Church) are the Bride. Just as new life comes from the union of man and woman, new life comes from the union of Christ and the Church—this new life is GRACE: the life of Christ in the soul, sanctification, holiness.

At Ordination, the priest becomes a real image of Christ, he is betrothed to the Church, and he is given by God the sacred powers of administering the sacraments. When administering the sacraments, **the priest acts in the person of Christ, and new life is generated within the Church:** the new life of GRACE in the soul. At Baptism, every Christian receives spiritual life from Christ, ordinarily through the spiritual fatherhood of a priest. This spiritual life is nourished with further reception of the sacraments, most commonly those of the Eucharist and Penance.

Spiritually, the priest fathers us into mature life in Christ. Just as a family needs a father, we need priests. Just as a good husband and father undertakes countless sacrifices for his family, the priest lays down his life in service to the Church, giving not only his time, effort, and natural talents, but also an outpouring of sacramental grace. **What an incredible gift God gives to us in each and every priest!**



Celibacy—Gift for the Priest and Gift for the Church

For the priest, celibacy is a **priceless gift from God** to be welcomed and continually renewed with a free and loving decision.



For the Church (the laity), celibacy is **the priest's gift of self**, expressing his service to the Church in and with the Lord, so that the Church, as Bride of Christ, is loved by the priest in the total and exclusive manner in which Jesus Christ loved her.



The human vocation is TO LOVE. Two ways of realizing this vocation in lifelong consecration are:

- marriage and
- celibacy.



Marriage is a sign of the eternal union of Christ and the Church. Celibacy is a more immediate and direct participation in that union. The man who sacrifices marriage for the sake of the Kingdom, is “skipping” the sign in anticipation of the real thing; he is living in confident anticipation of what will be fulfilled in Christ. Celibacy is not a rejection of sexuality, but a living out of the deepest meaning of sexuality—union with Christ and His Church.



The celibate priest is set apart from the ordinary demands of married life, to free him for the extraordinary responsibilities of being a spiritual father to the whole household of faith that is the Church, the family of God. Celibacy is a personal choice empowered by a particular grace. Hence, this vocation must be understood as voluntary and supernatural. The celibate priest devotes himself entirely to the supernatural love of God, which he is able to live out potently and joyfully.



Celibacy embraces the heavenly marriage we all long for—that union of Christ and the Church.

Once a Priest, Always a Priest

When a man is ordained a priest, an *indelible spiritual character* is placed on his soul. The vocation and mission he receives at Ordination *mark him permanently*. If just reasons exist, a priest can be discharged from his priestly functions, but he cannot become a layman again. Once a priest, always a priest.

The Grandeur of a Priest's Grace and Office

Priesthood necessarily involves the **grace of the Holy Spirit**. It was the grandeur of both this grace and the priest's office that led the young priest St. Gregory of Nazianzus to say:

“We must begin by purifying ourselves before purifying others; we must be instructed to be able to instruct, become light to illuminate, draw close to God to bring Him close to others, be sanctified to sanctify . . . Who then is the priest? He is the defender of truth, who stands with angels, gives glory with archangels, causes sacrifices to rise to the altar on high, shares Christ's priesthood, refashions creation, restores it in God's image, recreates it for the world on high and, even greater, is divinized and divinizes.”



IF WE FULLY REALIZED WHAT A PRIEST IS, WE WOULD DIE OF LOVE!

--St. John Vianney, Universal Patron of Priests