



VOCATIONS
ARCHDIOCESE OF CINCINNATI

Adult Faith Formation
“You are a Priest Forever” Psalm 110

Purpose:

In this current day and age when the priesthood has been under attack by reforming agents both within and outside the Church, what is needed is not reform, but a greater understanding of the role that priests play both in the Church and in the world today. Recognizing this need for renewal, rather than reform, Pope Benedict XVI has declared a ‘Year for Priests,’ during which he also declared St. John Vianney as Patron of All Priests. These reflections are designed to give the laity a better understanding of the role of priests in the Church, as well as a deeper understanding of how the laity and the clergy are to cooperate in the building of the Kingdom of God within the context of the modern Catholic Church.

Resources:

For a list of books on the priesthood from The Catholic Shop in Madeira, see this link:
http://www.mycatholicshop.com/index.php?target=categories&category_id=232

Fishers of Men DVD – available from the Vocation Office

Catechetical:

“The priest exists for one main purpose: to offer the Sacrifice of the Mass.”

With this rather bold statement, Fr. John Hardon, S.J., begins a short discourse on ‘The essential role of the Catholic priest.’¹ He continues that, without the priesthood, there would not only be no Sacrifice of the Mass, but there would also be no Catholic Church. While hyperbolic in nature, this approach is certainly in line with the Second Vatican Council’s realization that the Eucharist is both source and summit of the life of both the individual Catholic and the Catholic Church as a whole, for in the Eucharist, both in celebration and Adoration, we come face to face with our need for salvation, wrought for us upon the Cross of Christ.

In His wisdom, Jesus did not want to leave us orphans and unaware of our need for salvation, therefore He established the priesthood as a perpetual reminder of the gift of salvation He won for us on the Cross. In this light, we see the priest as a ‘living icon of Christ,’ as one who stands before us all and calls us to repentance, to a recognition of our need for salvation. In imitation of Christ himself, the priest has been ‘set apart’ to offer his life in ransom for the world. In this, he participates in the one Sacrifice of Christ through a complete ordering of self to Christ.

¹ http://www.ad2000.com.au/articles/2001/feb2001p20_145.html

But the priest does not do this for himself. As he gives his life for his people, he is called to be a living example of how the lay faithful are to model their lives on Christ, each in his or her own way. In the Church's understanding of the economy of salvation, in the way that salvation is played out in history, the priest is called to sanctify and bless the laity, while the laity then takes this blessing into the world so that they may sanctify and bless the society in which they live. Hence, we see a dynamic parallel: the priest is a leaven of holiness for his people, while they are then a leaven of holiness for the world. It is a magnificent interchange of gifts through which the Church, as the living Body of Christ, is made manifest in and to the world.

St. John Vianney, Patron of All Priests

During this 'Year for Priests,' as called for in the Church by Pope Benedict XVI, let us turn to the new patron of all priests, St. John Vianney.² Born in the tumultuous time of the late 18th Century, St. John Vianney is a perfect antidote to the horrors unleashed by the French Revolution. Not particularly gifted as a student and academician, he was dismissed from seminary three times during his formation, for fear that he was not smart enough to serve as a priest, especially with the demands of studying in Latin.

His dogged pursuit of the priesthood would not be denied, he was ordained to the priesthood on August 13, 1815, serving for a time as an assistant to the man who sponsored his vocation to the priesthood. Upon his patron's death in 1818, he was sent to the small village of Ars, a short distance outside the city of Lyon, France. The area was particularly hard hit by the French Revolution, in which a vast majority of the clergy and religious in France were disbarred from the clerical state, exiled or executed for their practice of the Faith, so that St. John found a sort of 'spiritual vacuum' existing as he arrived in his new assignment.

However, his lack of academic ability during seminary formation was not paralleled in his spiritual life. His deep and profound prayer life led to a rapid increase in the fame of this humble 'Curé of Ars,' as he saw his chief duty being the direction of souls. Soon after his arrival, pilgrims started to arrive from neighboring parishes, across France and even from far distant parts of Christendom. So massive were the throngs coming to see him, that he would spend up to 16 hours a day during the summer in the Confessional to free the people from their sins. Of note in the Confessional was his ability to read the souls of those who would come to him, often with the result that he would assign penances that would highlight a particular sin that the penitent might not have even confessed. While this sounds rather harsh, he always did so with a remarkable love and charity that grew from his own love for Christ. It is said "his instructions were simple in language, full of imagery drawn from daily life and country scenes, but breathing faith and that love of God which was his life principle and which he infused into his audience as much by his manner and appearance as by his words, for, at the last, his voice was almost inaudible."

St. John Vianney died on August 4, 1859, was declared Venerable by Pius IX on October 3, 1874, Beatified by Pius X on January 8, 1905 (at which time he was declared patron of parish priests, and Canonized by Pius XI in 1925. During this 'Year for Priests,' Pope Benedict XVI has declared him Patron of All Priests.

² <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08326c.htm>

Application for Today

In his address³ to the Bishops of Brazil, Northeast Region 2, on the occasion of their once every five years *ad limina apostolorum* visit on September 17, 2009, Pope Benedict addresses the complimentary role of priest and laity. He stresses that there is a fundamental difference between the ministerial priesthood and the lay faithful, and hence it is necessary to avoid the “secularization of the priests and the clericalization of the laity.” By this, the Holy Father is stressing the importance of each person knowing where they fit in the Body of Christ, and that each fulfills his or her mission according to this position.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) In your life as a Catholic, how has a priest made a positive impact in growing and developing your faith?
 - a. Who have been priests that have made this impact and what is memorable about the role he has had in your life?
- 2) What are positive steps you can take in regards to support of the priests in your parish?
- 3) How does the priesthood enable your role as an “evangelizer of culture” in your home, workplace and/or school?
- 4) What can you do to encourage your pastor to “be a St. John Vianney” for your parish?

³ For the Italian text: http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2009/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20090917_ad-limina-brasile2_it.html.

A summary in English can be found here: http://212.77.1.245/news_services/press/vis/dinamiche/d0_en.htm.