

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time – January 28/29, 2017 – Holy Orders – Homily I

From the very beginning of the Church He was raising up, Jesus gathered to Himself people of every shape and size, from every background and strata of society: there were lots of women: Mary, His Mother; Martha, the worker and Mary, her dreaming sister; the Magdalene with her powerful personality and unshakeable loyalty; widows and businesswomen; and there were kids: "let the little children come to Me, for to such as these belongs the Kingdom of heaven"; and there were the men: rich men like Zacchaeus and Joseph of Arimathea; powerful men like the Roman Centurion; religious men like Nicodemus; broken men like Dismas and the leper and the man born blind and Lazarus. And, from among all the people He called, He called twelve men to be His priests: four were fishermen, one was a political rabble rouser, one collected taxes for the Romans, another was a skeptic, one was smart and arrogant and had no problem helping himself to other people's money. Most never became famous. All had the faults of any other man. They all had doubts. None had great courage. One would become a traitor.

Jesus called weak men to be His first priests - maybe because the Lord knew that weak people sometimes need great heroes to look up to, but sometimes, weak people need weak people to look at to understand that if that guy can believe, maybe then so can I.

What are priests like?

Priests come in all shapes and sizes and colors: some are short; some are tall; some are fat and some are skinny; some priests smoke; some play sports; some are calm; some have tempers. Priests are Democrats and Republicans, Liberals and Conservatives. Some priests are smart and well-spoken and some priests are not too bright and wouldn't know an interesting sentence if it smacked them in the face. Some priests are holy and deeply prayerful and other priests struggle to find God and faith.

I know priests who are medical doctors; priests who are scientists, astronomers, and techies. I know priests who build houses, make pottery and I know priests whose hands have never hammered a nail. I know priests who are pilots, priests who are marines, priests who sail boats, and priests who run marathons. I even know priests who played pro sports and priests who acted in Hollywood movies. I even know a few priests who are genuine heroes.

But, almost all the priests I've ever read about, all the priests I've ever known, be they saints or sinners, they have one thing in common: they try to love the One who first called them and they try to be there in the good and the bad for the other people Jesus calls to follow Him. Many have feet of clay and heads filled with rocks, but most are Fathers who care for the Lord's kids as if they were their own.

And, what about us? What should we think of these odd-ducks?? People love their priests and hate them. People praise their priests and complain over them. People put their priests up on lofty pedestals and, just as quickly, shun them when they fall from grace. People desperately want good priests but almost never ask their sons to think

about being one. People bring their problems and broken hearts to priests. People entrust their buildings and programs to priests. People come to priests to celebrate their joys and come again to soothe their broken hearts. And, sometimes, the very same people wonder just what it is a priest could possibly do, outside of one hour on Sunday morning! People see priest as lonely, and yet, they always seem to have people around them.

People wonder how priests could give up love, and yet, so many priests are very much loved. People ask how priests could not have children, and yet, hundreds and hundreds call one man, one priest "Father".

Why would any man in his right mind want the life of a priest? Well, maybe being a little crazy does help, but, there was a priest who lived about 150 years ago, Jean-Baptiste Henri Lacordaire, who thought about it and came up with this:

To live in the midst of the world

Without wishing its pleasures;

To be a member of each family,

Yet belonging to none;

To share all suffering;

To penetrate all secrets;

To heal all wounds;

To go from men to God

And offer Him their prayers;

To return from God to men

To bring pardon and hope;
To have a heart of fire for Charity,
And a heart of bronze for Chastity;
To teach and to pardon,
Console and bless always.
My God, what a life;
And it is yours,
O priest of Jesus Christ.