

“Few Are Called... Are You Next?”

Nothing we can expect of our clergy can compare to the awesome responsibilities placed on them at ordination. They are not called to be perfect or angels. This is explained in St. Paul’s Epistle to the Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:1-6. “For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. Because of this he is bound to offer sacrifice for his own sins as well as for those of the people. And one does not take the honor upon himself, but he is called by God, just as Aaron was. So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him ‘Thou art my Son, today I have begotten thee’.”

The priest is that earthly link to help guide us toward our salvation as well as his own. His sins and weakness shouldn’t draw our attention away from Christ. As Fr. Anthony Coniaris, in These Are The Sacraments, quotes Karl Rahner (Meditations on the Sacraments), “...men are offended when someone appears to do God’s business and is still only a man. They want messengers who speak more brilliantly, heralds who preach more persuasively, hearts that burn with a hotter flame. Blessed will you be then, those of you who have not been scandalized at the man in the priest. He is so human so that you can believe that man-poor, real man- can possess the grace of God.”

How then can we begin to better understand our relationship with our spiritual fathers? Rahner advises in his article *The Priesthood*, “...Accept us as messengers of Christ. Let your hearts and minds swell with the grace of God so as to hear in our human words, in our fumbling, miserable, colorless and often repetitious words, the holy, blessed and powerful word of God, the word that brings God Himself and His eternal life into our midst... if, looking always through and beyond us, you set your gaze upon the Lord, then you will take from our words the comfort, the power and the eternal life that comes to you in the Word of God.”

This humanity and humility is illustrated in the priest’s private prayers during liturgy. In the Liturgy of St. Basil the Great, at the Offertory, the priest says, “...Look down upon me, thy sinful and unprofitable servant, and cleanse my soul and my heart from an evil conscience. And by the power of thy Holy Spirit enable me, who am invested with the grace of the priesthood, to stand before this thy holy table and to administer thy most pure and sacred body and thy precious blood...”

Fr. Coniaris uses an appropriate analogy in clarifying our relationship with our priest. He likens the role of the priest to the coach of a team. His responsibility is to discover, encourage, and cultivate the talents of his team. The true task of the priest is to train his people of God that they should go out into their community and the world and show their love of God and his people. We should embrace the true team given to us- the Church and her clergy. Instead of tearing down, let us enjoy and grow in grace.