

Bishop's Page
THE LORD WILL GIVE US PRIESTS
Most Rev. John J. Myers

Everyone who is baptized and lives in the grace of Jesus Christ is called to holiness. That is one of our greatest privileges. In contrast to the world around us, our vision extends beyond death to the joy and glory which the Lord is prepared to share with us.

One of the great mysteries of our life in Christ and in the Catholic Church is that Jesus calls some men and some women to help Him love and care for His people. Priests have a special role in this and in the life of the Church and in the lives and hearts of God's faithful. It is a wonderful thing when young people can begin to grasp something of this mystery and open their hearts to the grace of God.

During my years working with young men who may be called to the priesthood, I have learned that interaction with priests can be very helpful for them. They see priests as models. They learn that priests are normal people just as they are. They see priests having fun. And they see priests *praying* and loving the Lord and the people whom they serve. They see a life worth living.

They may also see that priests are not perfect. I tell them that one day they will look in the mirror and realize that they are not perfect either. This is part of the wonder. God chooses men who are not perfect and calls them to help love and care for his people.

I always stress that a vocation is not simply "about you." It is really about you and your relationship with God and with His Church. The simple prayer, which I have shared with people for years is this: "Lord, help me want to be what You want me to be." When people say this prayer honestly they are opening their very hearts and seeking the grace of God to know what His will is in their lives. Ultimately, our peace and happiness depend on our following God's will.

As one considers the possibility of ordination as a priest, it is important that he develop a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, especially in the Blessed Sacrament. I encourage more frequent attendance at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and visits to the Blessed Sacrament for quiet adoration and prayer. Making an attempt to participate in Mass one extra day per week would be a good beginning.

It is also important that one who aspires to the priesthood have a loving relationship with the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God and our mother. She, who was faithful even at the foot of the cross, can help us follow her example in embracing the will of God and finding all that He has prepared for us.

In preaching and in catechetical teaching, it is important that the true understanding of the ordained priesthood, which is held by the Church, be presented.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is a good place to begin. This involves a rather high notion of the priesthood as one of God's greatest gifts to the Church even while the priest is not to serve himself but to serve the Lord and his sisters and brothers. I believe this involves refusing to apologize for the gift of celibacy. Even though discernment may take some time in embracing this gift, it is important that it be accepted as one of Christ's great gifts to the Church.

Jesus Christ is the perfect high priest. The Catechism of the Catholic Church, quoting Sacred Scripture, reminds us that "by a single offering He has protected for all time those who are sanctified, that is, by the unique sacrifice of the cross." This sacrifice, accomplished once for all, is made present for us in the Eucharistic sacrifice of the Church. Priests and bishops are called by the grace of God and called by the Church to be ministers of Jesus Christ in serving his mission and their brothers and sisters in the Church. They minister in word and sacrament to other members of the family of God.

Studies show that one of the greatest obstacles for young people who wish to consider the priesthood is parental opposition or lack of family support. For this reason, I think that it is important that parents be somehow involved in the process of their children considering a vocation. Many parents worry that their children will be lonely and unhappy. Some of them may be focused on their desire for grandchildren. But helping parents understand what a fulfilling life of service the priesthood usually is can be of great assistance to all involved in the process.

Of course, it can be of great importance to have a priest address classes in schools and catechetical situations both to share their own observations and to respond to questions of the young people in an honest and unthreatening way. If the priests of a particular parish prefer, the local Vocation Office of the Diocese or Archdiocese almost certainly can be of assistance if they are contacted.

Pope John Paul II wrote about vocations to the priesthood. He began his document "I will give them shepherds *after my own heart*." I think this is a very important aspect of a vocation, realizing that it is not simply "my choice" and it is not simply a matter of the head, but also a matter of the heart. Those who would be priests must learn to love other people and have a great desire to assist them at important moments of their lives and difficult moments of their lives by proclaiming the Word of God and celebrating the Sacraments of the Church which are actions of both Jesus and the Holy Spirit. That is the wonder and the mystery of the holy priesthood. May God give the Church many more holy and good priests. We need them – we need their witness. And we need their faithful service.

Archbishop John Myers

The Most Reverend John J. Myers is Archbishop of Newark. He received a Licentiate in Sacred Theology from the North American College, Gregorian University, Rome in 1967, and gained his Doctorate in Canon Law from Catholic University in Washington, DC in 1977. From 1990 until 2001, he was Bishop of Peoria. The Archbishop currently serves as president of the Board of Regents and Board of Trustees of Seton Hall University, and

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