



Living the Truth in Love

The Wonderful Priests of Our Diocese

As we have come to the conclusion of the *Year for Priests*, I want to thank again emphatically the priests of our diocese for their fine ministry among us. Our priests, who represent a wide variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, truly are a dedicated and committed Presbyterate who generously give of themselves to serve the people of our diocese in many ways. At the recent Convocation of Priests which was held at the beginning of May, it was so heartening to hear both presenters, priest psychologists with a vast experience of working with priests from around the country, affirm our priests as a sincere, outgoing, friendly, good humored and committed group who are happy in their ministries and eager to serve their people. This affirmation is certainly my estimation of our priests from knowing them over the past years. We are blessed with a wonderful presbyterate in the Diocese of Palm Beach.

During this *Year for Priests*, we have undertaken a new program to assist our priests in their ministry. It is called, *Good Leaders, Good Shepherds*, and is sponsored by the Catholic

Leadership Institute. The program is effectively being carried out in over 40 dioceses in our country and has met with great success. Its purpose is to help priests understand their personal and spiritual abilities so they can be even better priests to the people of the parishes they serve. It is meant to assist them in the face of the myriad of responsibilities that are before priests today. We have over 30 priests, a good number for our size diocese, participating on a voluntary basis in the program. It is a rigorous and full program and the priests involved are most enthused about it. You may be familiar with the program from the priests of your parishes who may be participating in it. It is again very heartening for me to hear the presenters of the program, also with a great deal of experience of working with priests from other dioceses around the country, affirm our priests as a talented, committed and enthusiastic group. Again, my own estimation of our extraordinary presbyterate is confirmed from the outside.

Many fine books and articles have appeared on the priesthood and priestly spirituality during this *Year for Priests*. One of them, *A Priest's Life - the Calling, the Cost, the Joy*, is a series of personal reflections by priests from around the country on the sublime vocation of priesthood especially as it is lived in daily life. Such contributors as Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, Archbishop Edwin O'Brien, Bishop Victor Galeone, Father Andrew Apostoli, CFR, and Father James Martin, SJ, grace the pages. We are blessed to have not one but two priests of our Diocese also grace the pages with their reflections - Father Frank Lechiara and Father Alfredo Hernandez. That certainly is another affirmation of our fine presbyterate which comes from outside

The priesthood is a wonderful and mysterious calling that brings much joy to the man

who is called and to those he is called to serve. While we are all called to share in the priesthood of Christ and to be a priestly people, the ordained priest is called to do so in a unique fashion. At his ordination, the priest is configured to Christ, the High Priest and Good Shepherd, in such an intimate manner that he truly stands in the Person of Christ and carries out His ministry in the midst of the Church. The priest is Christ's ministry among us today. He carries out this ministry most directly in the celebration of the sacraments and especially in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. The priest reminds us that we are all called to holiness which is a true relationship with God that brings joy and meaning to our lives. The priest does this through his ministry, his teaching and his own personal example. The letter to the Hebrews reminds us that "One does not take this honor upon himself, but he is called by God" (Heb 5:14). This mysterious but real call is even better expressed by the Lord Himself in His words to His apostles at the Last Supper, "You did not choose me but I chose you" (Jn15:16). The priesthood is a call and God does indeed make the call. That call has to be listened for.

I began to hear the call to priesthood when I was young and still in grammar school. It was not a dramatic call but it was a slow and definite attraction to the particular life of a priest. It did not come from any special encouragement from my family except perhaps from the example of my mother's and father's commitment to their vocation of marriage and from the support they gave me in my decision. It was even a more subtle call since circumstances prevented me from attending Catholic school and I was a pupil in the public school system. However, it is clear in my mind that it came from the example, although from afar, from the priests of my parish who always seemed happy and, most importantly, available to people. People seemed to go to the priest both in the good times and the difficult times of their lives. The priest always seemed to have an affirmative response to their circumstances of life which could not be gotten from

anyone else. I was especially impressed that it was the priest who spoke a final word in the last stages of life when every other profession, including that of the doctor, could say no more. This, I thought was most significant especially when coupled with the fact that a priest's words could forgive sins and change bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ.

I kept hearing a call to a life which made a difference in the lives of others and which held an ultimate significance even beyond this life. When I was growing up, a TV series based on the movie, *Going My Way*, about the everyday lives of priests, was very popular. I used to watch it eagerly every week. When I told my father that I thought I might wish to be a priest, he was pleased but I remember his saying to me, "That's wonderful but you know it's not all like *Going My Way*!" How right he was in many ways as I have found the priesthood to be so much more. Everything I ever thought or dreamed about being a priest was not only true but true 100 times over and the years continue to confirm this experience.

We need to encourage young men to hear the call of the Lord to priesthood. That call has been there from that of the first apostles and it is there today in our world. If we consider that a particular young man might be a good candidate for priesthood, we should not hesitate to speak to him and certainly to support him. There is sufficient opportunity for us to do this in our families, among our friends and in our parishes. Of course, our own prayers also make a great difference.

Even though the *Year of Priests* has concluded, we all need to continue to thank and support our priests in their ministry among us. So many of you have done this in various ways during this past year and all of us priests are grateful for your affirmation. Our priests are a great

gift. Above all, we need to pray for them. We have wonderful priests in our Diocese of Palm Beach. May God continue to bless the good work he has begun through them and may more young men be inspired by their example and listen for God's call in their lives.

Most Reverend Gerald M. Barbarito

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