

# Standing on the shoulders of holy, dedicated priests

I wish I had a nickel for every time someone has asked me why I became a priest. It is an honest question, and each time I answer that inquiry I discover a new depth and marvel at how God has worked in my life.

As the pastor of St. Gregory the Great Parish in Williamsville, I know that the ministry I am blessed to celebrate today as a pastor is rooted in the lives of those who called me forth so many years ago.

Through all of these years, there has been one constant for me that has never been shaken, and that is the priests who were my inspiration. I was blessed to have eight diocesan priests in my high school; all of them have not only stayed in the priesthood, but have been exemplary models of priestly ministry.

I remember saying to my father when I finally told him that I wanted to be a priest, “Dad, I want to be just like them.” They were happy, dedicated men of faith, untiring servants of the Church. They loved being priests and showed it each day – in the classroom, as a track coach, moderator of the Home School Association, celebrant of Mass or presiding over a wedding. The priests

of Cardinal Mindszenty High School in Dunkirk have been, and remain today, a rock of strength for me.

It was through the grace of Christ working in the lives of these men, priests of the Diocese of Buffalo, that I was called to the altar for ordination on July 9, 1983; and by God’s grace to be the pastor of St. Gregory’s faith community today.

Little did I know at the time that their example was preparing me for everything from traveling with college students to New Orleans to serve those devastated by Hurricane Katrina; standing in front of a classroom of third-graders and speaking of the great gift of Eucharist; comforting a family at their time of loss or calling bingo numbers, to realizing that despite my weakness and sins, that God offers the Sacrament of Reconciliation through me as a priest. I find strength in knowing that at the end of the day, no matter the changes or turbulence that our Church undergoes, our God is with us and it will work out.

So I can say with a joyful spirit that my ministry as a priest today is a share in the ministry of those dedicated men and most importantly in the priesthood of Jesus Christ.

## *Year for Priests*

By Father Joseph Gatto



Pope Benedict XVI has asked the Church to celebrate “A Year for Priests.” While we celebrate the blessings of our priests let us make it also a year of invitation.

Many priests, religious and parents today are hesitant to speak about the blessings and great joy of priestly ministry in any form to the young people of our Church. I could not possibly enumerate all the reasons, but I can without doubt say that in our midst, men are being called to service for the sake of the Church and the Kingdom of God through the priesthood. Yet, how will they hear this call unless their family and friends, their parishes and we as a diocese speak the words of invitation? How will they respond unless we are modeling for them an example of dedicated service to the Gospel as servants of Christ?

I have been the pastor of St. Gregory the Great for over three years and I am repeatedly overwhelmed by the faith of our young people. They are looking for direction and a choice that makes eternal sense, not momentary fulfillment. They have a need for all of us to authenticate the Gospel by lifestyles that challenge them to holier lives. Many times the call to priesthood is not a spoken word, but more frequently is an experience of someone else living out their faith right in front of us. I pray that when the men of our day look at the priests in their midst, they will say to their friends: “I want to be just like them.” Then the new priests for our Church will surface; men will come forth in great numbers to give of themselves for others without counting the cost.

Every day, I thank God that I was given the blessing of holy priests, who by their example stated boldly that I too was being called to serve Christ as a priest. The best thing that we could do during the “Year for Priests” is to live our faith right in front of each other and let the grace of Christ do its work – and it will.

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