

# Year for Priests offers special opportunities for growth

I don't hear priests talk publicly about how wonderful the priesthood is as much as I used to, and that's a pity, because it is every bit as marvelous as it ever was.

I don't talk about how happy I am to be a priest as often as I might, and that's a shortcoming. I remember, shortly after I was ordained, I'd have to pinch myself to make sure that it was all real. I could hardly begin to enumerate the blessings that had come with being ordained.

Being able to see God forgive a person's sins in the sacrament of penance was a joy beyond anything I had ever imagined, and I was privileged to have been made an integral instrument in bringing that reality to God's people. Presiding at Mass was (and still is) the most fulfilling encounter of my life. It remains a blessing, for someone who is not afraid to use a dozen or more words when one would suffice, a marvel beyond what I could ever hope to express. I wouldn't trade it for anything in the world.

Within days after my ordination, I remember sitting at my desk in my monastic cell. I asked the Lord for the favor of never letting a day go by when I was not at least somewhat in awe of the fact the He had not only permitted, but had actually chosen me, such a poor sinner, to be ordained a priest. This grace of being "at least somewhat in awe" is a favor that the Lord, in His mercy, has

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By  
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been pleased to grant thus far. Blessed be God.

The truly awesome ordained priesthood is but one more way in which God shows His unbridled love for His people. Whenever, wherever that love is made manifest, we mere mortals come nose to nose with the greatest happiness human beings can know. To this, we may well apply the words of St. Paul, "there is great cause for rejoicing here."

Having said that, I suppose it must be asked if there had been scandals because of the sins and shortcomings of priests? Most assuredly. Are we "all thumbs" at a lot of stuff or do we make mistakes in judgment? You bet. Do priests fail, or irritate people, or do and say things we shouldn't? I know I do.

I could not begin to list my own shortcomings, let alone those of all the priests in the world. But, we ought not to confuse the shortcomings of men with the great gift God has given us in the

priesthood, any more than we ought to become cynical about the sacrament of marriage because human beings fail to live up to the ideal. Jesus works with sinners. If He didn't, we'd all be sunk.

Perhaps a more constructive and positive response would be to pray harder for priests. It ought to be pretty obvious by now that we need it.

Now that I have written all this, I fear that I have not even begun to express half of what I had hoped to say. Fortunately, someone much more eloquent than I (and that may be the understatement of the new millenium, at least thus far) has done a far better job than I ever could of writing about being a priest.

Earlier this year, Pope Benedict XVI wrote a tender, personal and theologically beautiful letter to every Catholic priest in the world. In this letter, the Holy Father has broken open for all, the depth and beauty of the priestly vocation.

This year is being dedicated to prayer for the sanctification and renewal of the clergy. The Holy Father has put forth an overview of the priesthood in his typically eloquent yet pastoral style. Thank God for loving His church so much that He still allows poor sinners to become priests, so that the Mass and the sacraments might be available for the salvation of His people.

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