

What do you look for in a priest?

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

If lay Catholics were asked on a survey what they most look for in a priest, some would say, "holiness," or variations thereof: "a deep spirituality," "prayerfulness," "love of God," and the like.

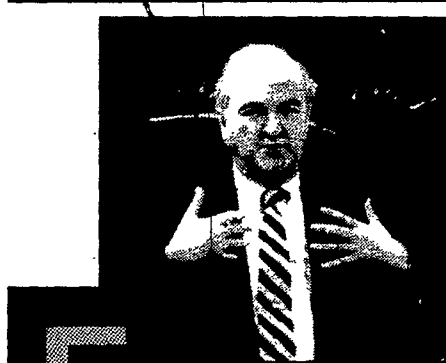
Church leaders are pleased with answers like that, because many equate such qualities with passivity. Priests who are "holy" or "prayerful" are priests who are not likely to "make trouble."

They won't challenge diocesan or Vatican decisions. They won't criticize diocesan or Vatican officials. They will loyally defend the church's most controversial teachings and disciplines. Neither will they ever feel the need for a lifelong, loving partner in marriage nor for children of their own because they are the type of "spiritual" people who throw themselves into their work and spend the remainder of their time "in prayer."

But that isn't what "holiness" and "prayerfulness" are all about.

Holiness is wholeness, as the title of Josef Goldbrunner's popular 1950s spiritual book once put it. The holy person — priest or lay — isn't someone removed from ordinary life and ordinary people. The holy person is someone who is fully rooted in the ordinary.

A holy person is, in a word, a healthy person.



ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

The holy person has a sense of humor. He doesn't take himself too seriously, and at the same time is gently amused by the pretensions of others.

The holy person is humble, which doesn't mean she lacks self-esteem. Humility is a virtue by which we see our relationship with God and with all reality in proper perspective.

The humble person knows that she is neither God's gift to the universe, nor God's most embarrassing mistake.

The holy person is sensitive to the presence and needs of other people, which means that this holy person is endowed with a sacramental vision, seeing God in all things.

For that reason, the holy person places human beings always above institutions. The holy person sees rules and regulations as guidelines, not millstones. People's well-being comes first.

The holy person has the capacity for empathy and for sympathy. She can put herself in the shoes of another, and is not afraid to reach out and to help bear another's burdens.

The holy person is forgiving, because she isn't too self-important to overlook a slight or an offense.

The holy person is a healer and a reconciler. He never rejoices in the shame and humiliation of another. He always seeks to bring people together, to build bridges, to repair damaged relationships.

The holy person has a sense of justice. She reacts not only when her own rights are violated but, more especially, when the rights of others are transgressed.

The holy person is courageous. He will stick his neck out to defend someone who has been wronged, even if it puts at risk his own economic security and career goals.

The holy person is simple in her demands and tastes. She doesn't require the trappings of power and privilege. She is content to have the freedom, the resources, and the space to do good for others.

The holy person is prayerful, which means that he lives every day of his life in the presence of God, even if he

rarely utters a formula of prayer or kneels at the back of a darkened church.

Because holy people are integrated human beings, they are not easily deterred from following their consciences. Appeals to "prudence" don't work. Nor do appeals to the "good of the Church." Nor do implied threats of any kind.

Holy people don't rationalize cowardice, lying, cheating, or injustice, even when committed within the church. Especially when committed within the church.

Does the church need "holy" priests today above all else? Of course, it does.

Priests who care deeply about other people as equals in the sight of God, who want to help other people without controlling them, who put people ahead of institutions, who try to relate to others the way God relates to them: with love, patience, forgiveness, mercy, compassion, justice, kindness, truthfulness, and a sense of humor as well.

Such priests — holy priests — are never passive. They will, on occasion, stand up for what they believe to be true and for what they believe to be right and just, even if their stance should place them at odds with their religious superiors, or with a portion of their congregations, or with the government.

Like the martyrs of El Salvador.
Like Jesus.

Author examines treasury of Christian music traditions

Book suggests hymns that enrich worship

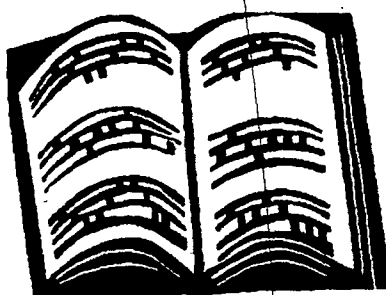
Words That Sing, by Gail Ramshaw; Liturgy Training Publications (Chicago, 1992); 167 pages; \$9.95.

By Father John J. Philipps
Guest contributor

When choir director Judy Echaniz and the late Monsignor Edward McNiff invited the Brighton Presbyterian Church Choir to sing during the 11:15 a.m. Mass at Blessed Sacrament Church on Nov. 15, 1964, the local press hailed the event as "unprecedented," "history-making," and "an interfaith boon."

Doubtless, some Catholics were shocked that non-Catholics should be allowed to trespass upon the quiet Latin solemnity of the Roman Catholic Low Mass with a Protestant "Holy, Holy, Holy" or an Anglican "For All The Saints."

A few days later, an editorial in Rochester's *Democrat and Chronicle* called



BOOK REVIEW

the service a "preview of the enrichment possible in worship services." (The Catholic Church was just two weeks away from the Mass in the vernacular.)

Words That Sing by Gail Ramshaw, a Lutheran, is a testimony to the enrichment this sharing of hymns has brought to both Catholic and Protestant worship.

The opening chapter, "What is A Hymn," not only clarifies a working definition of a good hymn, but it also warns that "several unhelpful tenden-

cies are recurring in the stacks of newly composed hymnody. Some hymns are marked by mediocre scriptural knowledge or erroneous theology. Some are smitten by immature emotion... Those hymns which snuggle up to God as my best buddy," warns Ramshaw, "might perhaps first kneel before the mystery of the divine."

Having stated her definitions and caveats, the hymnologist (sometimes echoing the sentiments of Thomas Day's *Why Catholics Can't Sing* — only more elegantly) presents us with commentaries on 40 examples of "words that sing" carefully selected from the rich treasuries of Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox traditions, and from contemporary idioms as well.

The poetic profundity of Aquinas ("Adoro Te") parades alongside the fervor of Martin Luther ("From heaven above"). Lyrical Francis of Assisi ("All creatures of our God and King") is matched with the prodigious versifier, Isaac Watts. John of Damas-

cus' ancient words ("Come ye faithful, raise the strain") sing with those of Taize's Jacques Berthier ("Jesus, remember me").

Roman Catholic readers, however, will wish *Words That Sing* included more than two entries from our splendid Marian musical tradition. If this reviewer were troubled by Ramshaw's conjectural interpretation of Medieval devotion to the Virgin, he nevertheless applauds her for noting Paul Cross's gem, the too seldom heard "Mary the Dawn, Christ the Perfect Day."

Helpful indexes include a chronology of the selections, a list of current hymnbooks in which they can be found, and copyright acknowledgments.

Pastoral musicians, liturgy planners, homilists, and all who love the liturgy will profit greatly from *Words That Sing* and, after reading it, will surely acclaim "Encore!"

Father Philipps is pastor of St. Bridget/St. Joseph Church in East Bloomfield.

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Truly you have
formed my inmost
being; you knit me in
my mother's womb.

Psalm 139, 13