

COLUMNISTS

The loneliness of the aging priest

Last week the Vatican held a gala celebration for priests in connection with the Jubilee Year 2000 and the 80th birthday of Pope John Paul II. In late February a letter of invitation had been sent to every priest in the world through his bishop or religious superior.

The event came at a time when the priesthood finds itself in one of its gravest crises in many decades. The good news is that more and more people are calling attention to the crisis. The negative trends, denied or ignored for many years, are now bubbling to the surface.

The change in atmosphere is reflected in the recent rash of writings on the subject. One thinks of Father Francis Dorff's "Are We Killing our Priests?" (*America*, 4/29/00), Paul Wilkes' "Facing the Reality of Gay Priests" (*The Tablet* [London], 2/26/00), and Father Donald Cozzens' challenging book, *The Changing Face of the Priesthood* (The Liturgical Press, 2000). Father Cozzens is an especially threatening figure to many because his description of the crisis cannot easily be dismissed. He has been both president-rector of a major seminary and vicar for priests in the Diocese of Cleveland. Those who have known him well over the years recognize him to be a balanced and pastorally gifted priest.



essays in
theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

Outstanding among the recent articles is Eugene Kennedy's "Saving Fr. Ryan - Understanding the Good Priest" (*National Catholic Reporter*, 3/31/00).

Kennedy, a nationally known psychologist, knows whereof he speaks. The crisis, he suggests, is not about sex (in its conventional meaning), but about loneliness. As mammoth rectories (once housing four or five priests) emptied, lone priests have been left to manage single-handedly, doing more than ever, but with no one even to talk to during the 11 o'clock news. Such rectories have become museums of silence.

The center of the pre-Vatican II clerical universe has not held, and priests have had to seek new centers elsewhere. These are, for the most part, priests now in their late 50s, 60s and early 70s. Their

parents are aged and increasingly dependent, and many, if not most, are already deceased. The priests themselves have medical problems - problems they never even thought about 20 years ago.

Add to this the reality of retirement. Priests ordained before Vatican II thought they were embarking upon a lifetime ministry. There was no need to save for retirement, nor to wonder about where one would live or how one might provide for medical care in old age.

One of the most poignant conversations I had with my late archbishop concerned this. His episcopal residence was then in a convalescent facility staffed by a religious community of women. He was widely admired for living so simply.

There was also a handful of priests in residence there - all retired, some ambulatory, others requiring round-the-clock care. When I asked why there weren't more clergy in the retirement wing for priests, the archbishop said simply, "They can't afford it."

The psychological cost of celibacy, Kennedy says, is not born primarily by the young priest, but by the older priest. The long-term sacrifice - the absence of companionship, family, and support systems - becomes more acute as the priest ages and his health begins to deteriorate.

"In this aging population of priests," Kennedy writes, "there are men in their 70s who are just beginning to feel how lonely and isolated they are after keeping faith with their vows of celibacy all through their lives."

Was celibacy a positive force in their lives, he asks, or was it instead something they endured in order to continue with the work they so loved as priests? Kennedy maintains that they "adjusted" to celibacy rather than "lived it as some energizing virtue."

The adjustments that many good priests have made and continue to make "are, for the most part, healthy and they are also a sign of how greatly transformed is the priesthood beneath the surface. It is also testimony to what good men must do to stay-alive when they are living lives that are as pressured and largely unrewarded as theirs."

Eugene Kennedy refers to such priests as "true brothers to the Prodigal Son." "It is time," he concludes, "we killed the calf and lighted the candles for a feast to honor them."

The Jubilee for Priests in Rome last week isn't quite what he had in mind.

...
Father McBrien is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame.

Love and happiness require giving relationships

Sixth Sunday of Easter (May 28): (R3) John 15:9-17; (R1) Acts 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48; (R2) I John 4:7-10.

Jesus told his followers, "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you." Jesus' words are the model for us all. Because God loves us, we love one another. Because he forgives us, we forgive one another. The self-giving love of God is the heart of the Gospel.

There is a link between love and happiness. Love is essential to joy.

In Charles Schulz's Peanuts cartoon, Charlie Brown and Lucy are discussing the meaning of existence.

"Why do you think we are put here on earth, Charlie Brown?" Lucy asks.

"To make others happy," answers Charlie Brown.

Lucy is not pleased with this answer. She says, "I don't think I'm making anyone very happy. Of course, nobody's making ME very happy either..." Lucy then becomes quite indignant and roars, "Somebody's not doing his job!!!"

What does it take to be happy? We can't give a precise answer because it will vary according to individual needs. However, we can say this: No one can be truly happy who is not in a proper relationship with God and with other people.



a word
for
sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SILAMON

C.S. Lewis avoided getting connected to anyone until he gave his heart to his beloved wife, Joy. The movie, "Shadowlands," is their story. Lewis would later write: "To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket - safe, dark, motionless - it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. The only place outside heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers of love is

hell."

Lewis is saying to us that, where there is no love, there is no happiness. Jesus said to his disciples, "All this I tell you that ... your joy may be complete." Jesus had another point to make about love: Love requires sacrifice. He put it this way: "There is no greater love than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends."

Princess Alice, the second daughter of Queen Victoria, had a 4-year-old son whom she dearly loved. He contracted "black diphtheria", highly contagious and very deadly. Alice was warned not to go near the child.

One day she heard him whisper to a nurse, "Why doesn't my mother kiss me anymore?" She raced to her son's bed, held him in her arms and smothered him with kisses. Tragically, this would be the kiss of death for Alice. In a matter of weeks, both she and her son were buried.

Throughout history, the one driving force that has moved humanity forward has been the willingness of parents to sacrifice so their children would have a better life. But today, mothers on drugs ignore their little ones. Fathers on drink ignore their families. Some fathers even go off with another and leave wife and children to fend for themselves.

How can the so-called followers of Christ ignore their model? God so loved the world that he gave. Where there is no giving, there is no love.

Love and happiness are inseparable. Love requires sacrifice. Yet love is the central commandment that Christ gives to those who would be his followers.

...
Father Shamon is administrator of St. Isaac Jogues Chapel, Fleming.

Daily Readings

Monday, May 29

Acts 16:11-15; John 15:26-16:4

Tuesday, May 30

Acts 16:22-34; John 16:5-11

Wednesday, May 31

Zephaniah 3:14-18 or
Romans 12:9-16; Luke 1:39-56

Thursday, June 1

Acts 1:1-11; Ephesians 1:17-23 or
Ephesians 4:1-13 or 4:1-7, 11-13;
Mark 16:15-20

Friday, June 2

Acts 18:9-18; John 16:20-23

Saturday, June 3

Acts 18:23-28; John 16:23-28



Rediscover St. Andrew's

Sunday, June 4th at the 11:15 Mass

See how a fresh coat of paint has helped bring back the beauty and charm of this old church.

Come see the renovations of the
Lift Up Your Hearts Campaign.

Worship with former classmates and parishioners.

A breakfast/brunch will be catered by Joan Smaldone following Mass.

Donations: \$12.50 Adults and \$8.00 for Children under 8 years of age.

All proceeds go to help "LIFT UP YOUR HEARTS" Deadline for Tickets May 25th. Please send your check to Lift Up Your Hearts. Include a self addressed stamped envelope.

ST. ANDREW'S CHURCH

923 Portland Ave., Rochester NY 14621 • 342-8686

Come early and see a work in progress. Share in our Easter joy. Alleluia!

**HART
MONUMENT
COMPANY**

Since 1856

Monuments, Markers
and Cemetery Lettering

2301 Dewey Avenue

(OPPOSITE HOLY SEPULCHRE CEMETERY)

(716) 865-6746



Since 1895

**MARRION
MONUMENTS**

476 State St.
(Corner Jay)

546-4450

M/F 9-5, Sat. 10-2

e-mail us at
cathcour@frontiernet.net