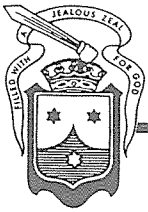


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Life is Worth Giving

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO ALL THE PRIESTS?

by Fr. Kevin Shanley, O.Carm.

In the current climate of the Church in the U.S. and elsewhere, the attractive image of the priesthood has diminished to a great extent. What was once a revered and honored "vocation" among Catholics is now a very low priority on the list of possibilities for Church members as a future calling to which one's life might be dedicated.

Clergy departures and failings, often blazoned in the press, have ~~been~~ served to lower the morale of both clergy and laity.

As a possible consequence, many Catholic clergy have actually become rather defensive about their vocation as witnessed by the absence of the Roman collar and clergy attire, and the lack of promotion ^(of) and attendance at clerical events. The clergy have tended to seek other interests and occupations. In this way, it seems, they might become more relevant to their parishioners and society in general.

In other words, being a priest isn't "in" anymore among large segments of the laity, Catholic or otherwise. The world of the clergy, as exemplified by Hollywood movies starring Bing Crosby, Pat O'Brien or Spencer Tracy, is no more.

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Yet in a 1987 survey of Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist and Episcopal churches, some ~~82%~~ 82% of the respondents viewed a pastor's main duty as "deepening parishioners' spiritual lives." Only preaching God's Word ranked higher. 200

Yet only 33% of those who responded to the survey admitted that their pastors did a credible job at either task. This leads to the inevitable question on the part of many parishioners, young and old: What is the cause of the problem, and how can it be resolved?

Perhaps part of the ~~answer~~ answer might simply be that when the Church holds official gatherings, rather than ~~meetings~~ almost always focusing on such topics as Authority, the Magisterium, (Infallability) ~~and~~ and similar subjects, such meetings might well (IDEAL) with things that effect the ordinary lives of parishioners. These might include: What is the value of priesthood in bringing meaning to peoples' lives? How to find healing for those wounded by life? How to help people fulfill their hopes and dreams? and, How to find in the Church a place of solace and inspiration? 300

Recent surveys on priestly morale in the U.S. indicate that it is a serious problem. It is not only the growing shortage, which is difficult enough, but the growing lack of meaning, affirmation and fulfillment that has taken the former "glory" of the priesthood and replaced it with the "gloom" of today. 350

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When such an eventuality occurs, it is not difficult to understand why even though most priests want to remain in their vocation, the temptation is great to find something else to do which gives status and prestige to lives that are sadly lacking both.

It is then that the wisdom of age and the ability to reflect on life's experiences can play an important role. Seniors can be much more understanding and encouraging to priests of all ages that their lives spent in the service of God and ~~the~~ people are valuable and worthwhile both in time and eternity.