

## Preface

This pamphlet is made available primarily for seminarians and young priests. The Catholic Church is the Church of the Eucharist. There can be no Eucharist without the priesthood. Therefore, vocations to the priesthood and the need for happy priests are of concern to every dedicated Catholic. It is suggested that after reading this pamphlet you share it with some seminarian and/or young priest.

### HOW TO BE A HAPPY PRIEST

I have been an ordained Roman Catholic priest for more than 50 years. I can tell you, and many who know me will tell you, that I am a happy priest. The reason I am happy is because I feel fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Although now in the practice of Christ's holy priesthood for over 50 years, I still look for more opportunities each day to reach out to others for the good of their souls and for the glory of God.

Recently, I talked to a priest who was ordained less than a year. When I asked him, "Are you happy as a priest?" he faltered for words. He was not ready to give an unqualified answer. He said, "There is so much tension and disobedience out there, and it is so difficult to be a priest today." This young priest later spent considerable time with me. It was obvious that he wanted always to be a good priest. Still, he feared, with the stories he heard of failures among some priests, that he might be tempted and fail to live his vows.

I reminded this young priest that we are promised by God's Word that we will never be tempted beyond our strength. The extraordinary graces of the Sacraments are there and they are there for each of us daily. I told him to phone me if ever temptations against his commitment for life in Christ's holy priesthood assails him in the future. A priest is a priest forever.

Recently I found in my notes, yellowed with age, written down either as a seminarian or as a young priest the following thought: "Celibacy in the priesthood while at times may find one feeling lonely, that loneliness is designed to cause a vacuum which for the priest can only be filled with love for Jesus Christ and the people of His holy Church."

I can honestly say that in my years as a priest I have never been lonely for very long. Yes, there have been lonely moments. And those lonely moments were times to renew my commitment and vows.

Rather than loneliness, there have been more times when I longed to be alone for a while. I wanted to be alone so as to be alone with God so that my life might be centered on God alone. I wanted to be alone at times so as to be more fruitful in preparing articles, books, sermons, classes, and lectures. I can say I've never been seriously tempted to break any priestly vows. I've been too occupied with the practice of the priesthood, reaching out to others, than to give time to temptation against what is my greatest joy: preaching the Word of God, offering the divine Liturgy, administering the Sacraments, teaching youth the Way, the Truth, the Life.

### A Priest is not a Priest for himself

I realize that a priest's life centered on God must still involve God's people, for the very

nature of priestly powers and duties is to act in the person of Christ, the head of the Mystical Body. The Catholic priest not only represents Christ but acts *in persona Christi* in offering the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and administering the Sacraments. Jesus Christ also acts through the priest when he reads the Scriptures in church and teaches the Word of God as pointed out by the Second Vatican Council. Jesus Christ is Truth. He is *the Way, the Truth, and the Life*. The priest commissioned to teach the Word of God must always preach and teach the Truth. Never should he compromise the Truth of faith and morals. If he attempts to do so, he is compromising Jesus Christ. The priest should preach the Truth in season and out of season. He should preach the full Gospel, the fullness of truth; whether at a particular time and place it is popular or unpopular to do so. If in preaching the truth a priest becomes controversial, he should be grateful for Jesus Christ was a man of contradiction to the world, to the world's way of thinking and acting. Preaching is not to entertain, but to give knowledge of Jesus Christ so souls can be formed in Christ's love. Don't try to compete with the world in entertaining. It is contrary to the priest's vocation and you will always lose.

### A Priest should be a sign of contradiction

When the Christ Child was presented in the temple, Simeon inspired by the Holy Spirit, took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said to Mary His mother, "Behold this Child is set... for a sign that is spoken against, and a sword will pierce through your own soul also." (Luke 2:25-36). Interestingly that whereas Luke tells us that His father and His mother marveled at what was said about Him, the above quoted words were directed not to both St. Joseph and the Blessed Virgin Mother but only "to Mary His mother."

Those called to the priesthood of Jesus Christ are called not only to be good, but to be holy, to be a sign of contradiction to the world. If you carry out your mission as not simply a good man but as a true priest, you will be spoken against, you will be contradicted, even persecuted. If you seek to be a popular priest, one who entertains, one who speaks what people in general want to hear, you will not be a holy priest. You will not be fulfilling the mission for which you were ordained.

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 5:10). Yes, Jesus promised a hundredfold to those who leave all things, even family members, and follow and serve Him in His holy Church, but don't miss the fullness of all He promised: "and persecution besides." "If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospels will save it" (Mark 8:34). If such words of Jesus Christ apply to all, how much more to the priest who has the indelible character of Christ the High Priest forever sealed on his soul.

Seminarians and young priests should get ready for this. Not only will you be criticized, even persecuted by laity who do not want to hear the truth, but you will receive such treatment even from some priests and fellow religious. If you give your whole heart to Jesus in work and concern for souls full time, you will be a threat to many who should be working with you. You will then be a special priest-son of Mary and your heart will be pierced at times, as was our Mother Mary. But She will protect you.

## Teach Vatican Council II correctly

Pope John XXIII called the Ecumenical Council known as the Second Vatican Council during the early years of my priesthood. I was enthusiastic then for what the Council stood for. I remain enthusiastic for it now. One who has actually read prayerfully and studied the documents of the Second Vatican Council will find nothing disharmonious with the first two thousand years of the teachings of Jesus Christ and His Church. There is nothing disharmonious in the Second Vatican Council with the other 20 Ecumenical Councils.

The development of Catholic doctrine builds. It does not contradict what went before. Father John A. Hardon, S.J., who was theological adviser to an Apostolate for the Family I founded, once said to me that given the conditions of the modern world, the problems of the Church today would be much greater if there had been no Second Vatican Council. The abuses that disturbed many are not to be found authorized in any Vatican II documents.

Most of the years I've worked to faithfully live Christ's holy priesthood have been years beset with struggles and contradictions. The true teachings of Christ's Church have always been a contradiction to the world. The confusion that came about both during and after Vatican Council II disturbed many of the faithful so that they were no longer faithful.

If a theologian, priest, or religious is not faithful, how can they guide and inspire the faithful to remain faithful or grow in the faith? They are then rather the cause, in too many cases, for souls to weaken in the faith or even to lose their faith altogether.

The only way a priest will be happy in the priesthood is if he consistently lives and teaches the fullness of truth. Watering down the content of the faith and morals of Catholicism will bring much tension and unhappiness to the priest himself and to others. If a priest thinks it will make him popular or liked by making the demands of the Gospel and of the Church easier for people, by hiding or weakening the demands of Christ to carry one's cross daily, the truth is, that priest will be miserable in this life. He will endanger his place in eternity for he is not living out the mission Jesus Christ gave him when he was ordained.

Yes, there are those who slap such priests on the back if the priest attempts to offer cheap bargains on an easy way to salvation. In reality behind the scenes, usually not visible to the priest in his blindness, he is criticized much. Not only is he criticized when he does not teach the truth, if he is observant, he will notice the numbers practicing the faith will dwindle. He will recognize no fruit from his labors, only decay.

## Might as well be criticized for teaching truth

Seminarians and young priests, you are going to be criticized when you live and teach as you should in the name of Jesus Christ. For happiness in time and in eternity accept criticism for the Truth who is Jesus Christ. "Pray for those who persecute you", but never compromise by your silence or watered-down teachings. By the way, if you don't speak for Christ, you will still be criticized. Better to be criticized for being Godly than being worldly. Happy priests learn this early in their priesthood.

Why is it that conservative fundamentalist communities are growing rapidly while communities among the mainline churches that have become very liberal in their doctrines see their membership falling rapidly in numbers? Why? The answer should be obvious. They are not being fed solid meat. Their people are starving for substance while their ministers or priests are attempting to entertain them and make them feel good about themselves. They are preaching the

world, not Christ Crucified.

This short essay was being written at the time of the death (April 2, 2005) and funeral (April 8) of Pope John Paul II the Great. The public, including world leaders, spoke of his greatness. Millions came to his funeral. Major television networks occupied most of their time for a week reporting on this Pope so admired by the world. The center of Rome had to be closed to traffic. People were asked through the media to discontinue coming to Rome. There was no more space. Hundreds of millions followed the funeral worldwide via television and radio. Three days before the official funeral Archbishop Angelo Comastri, vicar for Vatican City State, said it well as he concelebrated a Mass with other bishops for the repose of the Pope's soul: "Today we see a river of people filing before the Pope because he with his testimony has awakened our faith and therefore our community. This is John Paul II's last silent homily."

Dignitaries as well as heads of state came from 138 nations. People waited in line two or more miles long. It was estimated that more than four million people filed past his remains in St. Peter's.

Crowds in the square chanted "Santo subito," a Latin phrase meaning "Sainthood at once."

Cardinal Ratzinger, now Benedict XVI, in the homily at the funeral Mass said, "Thanks to his being profoundly rooted in Christ, he was able to bear a burden which transcended merely human abilities: that of being the shepherd of Christ's flock, His universal Church." Yet, he radiated happiness.

For a priest to be happy, his life must be "rooted in Christ." The priest, who engages in worldly activities and entertainments, and who compromises true teachings on Catholic faith and morals, is not one whose life is rooted in Christ. He will be unhappy as a priest because he then is not living a priestly and Christ-like life. In fact, to put it bluntly, he is attempting to live a lie. Such a priest is not leading the faithful forward. He is rather as a wolf scattering the flock. There can be no happiness in attempting to live a lie.

Every priest and seminarian is aware that the respect and honor shown Pope John Paul II would not have developed over his twenty- seven years as Pontiff, if he had not been a man who was fearless in proclaiming publicly the Truth, which is Jesus Christ.

When Pope John Paul II became an old man with stooped shoulders, not able to walk unaided and with trembling hand from Parkinson's, still young people by the hundreds of thousands came to greet him. They listened to his messages packed with proclamations of true faith and morals. These large crowds of teenagers and young adults would applaud whenever Pope John Paul II spoke tough love. They applauded when he encouraged them to use the Sacrament of Confession frequently. They applauded him when he stood up for purity and holy marriages. They applauded whenever he spoke for human life and dignity. They applauded him when he spoke against the drug culture.

Is there not a message in all this for seminarians and priests? "Be not afraid" to proclaim Christ Jesus, His true faith and morals, and do so openly and without reservation. Preach the full Gospel.

Priests must stand up for the Truth. They must be willing to be persecuted for living an authentic priestly life. They must challenge all others, regardless of their vocation in life, to stand up for Truth and live it. If priests refuse to live the truth, the people will do likewise.

Who carried greater burdens than Pope John Paul II? Was he happy? Amidst multiple

afflictions from gun shot wounds, broken bones and various illnesses, he taught a world which had forgotten God in many ways, and forgotten the meaning of commitment, to be loyal and consistent in his teachings until the very end. And he was happy. It radiated from him, as did his prayerfulness and holiness as he met crowds of people.

On Wednesday, three days before his death, he appeared at his window, weak, face distorted with pain, and tried to speak and bless the people. His pain and efforts spoke volumes of his commitment. He was teaching loyalty to Christ and His Church, to the very end.

## Much unhappiness today

There is much unhappiness among people today. Why? In short, the reason is because they are not living their God-given vocations in the manner God intends. The priest will be happy only if he lives the priesthood as a divine vocation, and not as just another job.

Many youth today are confused and not happy. They lack direction. They lack guidance. They often lack an understanding of the very basics of Catholicism. And what they lack is often for two reasons. True faith has not been *taught* and true faith has not been *lived* consistently by both their priests and their parents. Often their parents also have not been taught and formed correctly and know not how to teach and form their children.

## Only Priests true to the Teacher can be the Remedy

Who is going to do that teaching and give that guidance for Catholic people? It must be the priests. After the Second Vatican Council, there was the Catholic moment. This country could have been converted to Catholicism. It was not converted because priests missed the Catholic moment. Rather than seizing the moment to evangelize, many priests turned in on themselves.

I was still a relatively young priest then. I worked to study and follow what Vatican II said. At the same time I heard an unhealthy number of priests speak, write and act like cry-babies. They compared themselves to worldly vocations. Many barrels of ink were used to try to convince priests and others that the priesthood should be compared to other worldly jobs or secular professions.

## Life of selfish complaints

Here are some of the things they circulated: Priests have many years of education. Thus their salary should compare with doctors, lawyers, etc.? The average layperson works thirty-five to forty hours a week. Why should the priest be always available? Should he not have working hours like others and have his evenings free? They too should have office hours. Other professionals have homes away from their work. Should not a priest have a home away from the Church and his office? Lay professionals retire at sixty-five, some at fifty-five. Should not the priest be able to retire, relax and enjoy his senior years? Jesus Christ never forbids priests to marry. Should not priests be permitted to marry so as to attract more to the priesthood? The list goes on. WHERE WAS JESUS CHRIST IN ALL THIS TALK AND WRITING THAT WENT ON FOR YEARS? The effects are still heavily with us.

An elderly, holy priest years ago said to me: "A priest should work until he drops." That was my understanding as I studied in the seminary and was ordained. Did not Pope John Paul II

give us that lesson when those few days before his death he stood at the papal window struggling to speak and to bless and then, as it were, fell back into his chair? This is authentic love.

## Priests are not teaching true family values

The Church cannot have holy priests if it does not have many holy families. How will we get those holy families? Parents seldom if ever hear from the pulpit of the right structure and functioning of the family as God created it and intended it. Many priests today fear to teach the following: The man, the husband, is the head of the family. The wife, the mother, is the heart of the family. The man has primacy in authority and must be Christ-like in exercising it. The mother has primacy in love. She should not usurp the father's role. But are priests teaching it?

The chief disciplinarian of children must be the father as God intended. The wife, St. Paul reminds us, is to be submissive to her husband. She is not the head of the home. Too many women influenced by the feminists have confused their roles and usurped the father's role regarding the children. The feminist movement has made wimps of many men who thus step back and let their wives dominate in the home. Those men also have been deeply affected by the women's lib movement.

There has been a confusion of roles in the family. Many a husband has relinquished his role as head. Wives rule in the vast majority of homes today. This is why there is the crisis of family life today.

Decades ago, when I was a young man, it was said of women who dominated in the home, "She wears the pants in that home." It was not intended as a compliment. Today, many women who have given up much of their God-intended femininity, and their role of submission, not only attempt to rule the home, that is, rule their husbands and children, but in fact do wear pants as they have given up feminine dresses and embraced the styles of the modern secular liberated society. Their dress has become masculine. They loath the wearing of a veil as a sign of submission as taught in the Bible by the Apostle, St. Paul. For those who think this inconsequential, please check the divorce rate.

## Priests fail to preach on root causes

Unfortunately few priests and bishops preach on the root causes of family crises. It is not popular to do so. It takes courage to launch out into the deep and face honestly what is causing the horrible failures of so many marriages today. The priest must conquer his fear in telling men they are failing in their roles as head of the home and disciplinarian of the family. He must conquer his fear to tell women they are usurping the role of their husbands and taking on masculine roles as demonstrated by the way they act and dress.

I once gave a talk, *The Root Causes of Family Problems*. Thousands of the audio cassettes with that title are circulating at present. Parents who have listened to the talk, write or call to say how it has helped their family. The subject matter is what many priests fear to preach on. Yet, the response of mothers and fathers has been positive. Most people want to know the truth, even if at the moment they might not be able to do it perfectly. That is where the priest is critically important, to help the couple fight the world and follow Godly principles. It will definitely be hard for both priest and couple, but the rewards are eternal. Any successful person will tell you that if success were easy, everyone would be successful.

Parents must be brought to realize that they can pray the Rosary devotedly each day, even

attend daily Mass, but if the husband and wife do not each exercise their proper God-given role as head and heart in daily living at home, there will still be a family crisis. There will be unhappiness for all members of the family. Grace builds on nature. Each parent must fulfill the role, which the Author of nature intended. Praying in itself, while important, will not accomplish it. Prayer will aid the couple in fulfilling their God-given natural role; it will not do it for them. It is the priest's responsibility to get them to understand this and then aid them in their efforts to put it into practice.

### A test whether you fear to teach

A good test to see where you stand in all this, ask yourself, do I have the courage to write on and preach Ephesians 5:21-33?

Also, would you fear to preach 1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 11:1-16? Would you fear to preach what St. Paul said about women wearing the veil? Had our good priests understood the feminist agenda, they would not have allowed them to challenge the Church and win out as they did. Many in the Church did not fully understand the psychological effect. Rather they viewed the veil as just a custom that was outdated. There is a growing movement to return to the veil, due primarily to young women wanting to be faithful to Scripture and Church Tradition. It would add much to reverence in church if women heard the priest preach the Word of God according to St. Paul rather than the worldly feminist who contributed heavily to the destruction of the family.

As an editor and former columnist, I still receive many communications. Good Catholics write about the poor taste in dress, even immodest dress, with which many come to Mass on Sundays. Shorts and T-shirts seem common in warmer weather.

Where has the tradition gone to wear our "Sunday best" when coming to the holy Sacrifice of the Mass? How many priests fear to even mention these subjects. It would be an opportunity for priests to speak on the Real Presence of Jesus Christ, our Lord, God and Savior, and the Sacrifice of the Mass as perpetuating Christ's own sacrifice and why we should come modestly dressed and in our best? A young man who had come into the Church recently said to me, "I came to realize the fullness of true faith in Catholicism. But when I went to Sunday Mass I saw many in sloppy dress, even immodest dress. Yet the priests said nothing about this to instruct the people." Many priests, out of fear, fail to educate the people on such matters. They are failing in their priestly duties. Is there any wonder surveys indicate a drastic decline in Mass attendance and the loss of faith among many "Catholics" in the REAL PRESENCE???? The priests have to be the ones who educate their people on these matters. Only then will they experience true fulfillment in their priestly lives. Why, because that is the way God made us. We were designed by God to produce good fruit, and if the fruit is rotten we can never be happy.

### A Priest must never hide his identity

A priest will be happy when he truly understands whom he represents. When I was still in seminary I remember reading in the life of a saint who was told by our Lord that people meeting a priest on the street or elsewhere would think of Jesus Christ if that priest were living a true priestly life.

Priests should wear the Roman collar as a sign of Christ for mankind today. People want to see priests as men of God. Many priests today ignore such exhortations. Unfortunately some bishops encourage their priests to come to priestly gatherings dressed informally. I must say I've

never accepted such encouragements but have listened to higher Church authority, which says priests should be identified by their clerical attire. A bishop in Spain recently asked all his priests in a letter: “Why is it that in a secular society such as ours, priests are contributing to the erasing of all signs of God and hiding their consecrated nature by not dressing as priests?”

I now live in the so-called “Bible Belt” of the United States after living in the North as a priest for 48½ years. In the couple of years I’ve been here, I’ve seen and experienced only respect and friendly greetings and smiles as I am always identified in public places as a priest. My collar reminds me, as well as everyone else who sees it, who I am: a priest of God’s holy Church.

### Priests to be judged on what they have not taught

Priests will be judged by God not only on what they preached, but what they failed to teach. I’ve heard from good lay people that they have never heard a sermon on the Church’s teachings which condemn artificial birth control. Married couples have informed me that when they attended pre-marital classes before their wedding nothing was said about the Church’s teachings, based on the laws of God, that artificial birth control is seriously sinful.

Young people have informed me that they have reached teen-age, even young adulthood, without ever being taught about purity, whether about personal purity or the serious sin of fornication. Many young Catholics have said that their religion classes had little doctrine or morals and even gave the impression that one church was as good as another. I fear that many priests are more interested in TV than Church teachings. It is highly unlikely that a priest who watches TV for hours each week will ever develop the wisdom to aid the faithful.

### Happiness in fulfillment

The priest will find happiness when he lives for love of Jesus Christ and His Church. He will find happiness in seeing the people God entrusted to him come closer to Jesus Christ because of his own example. He will be happy when he fully surrenders his life to Jesus by teaching in harmony with the Gospel and the Magisterium.

The priest will be happy when a young man expresses interest in the holy priesthood because he has been touched by the holiness he reflects as a priest. The priest will be happy when he reaches out to children to teach them and to parents to motivate them.

I share here a few of many examples that have made me happy as a priest. As I was writing this pamphlet my former bishop for more than eighteen years phoned me to tell me he would be delighted to concelebrate with me on the anniversary of my 50<sup>th</sup> year in the priesthood. He had come to see me in recent months and spoke to others of my great love for the Mother of God.

On the very day I was writing this part of the pamphlet a priest of 16 years wrote me saying: “The Lord has been so good in you and through you. I’m forever grateful for your encouragement and the fostering of my vocation. Your example remains steady. I’m one of the hundreds of young priests who credit you for assisting or fostering a priestly vocation. I hope that throughout my years of aiding young people in discerning their vocation, I can put into practice what you gave me. Thank you for being a priest of Jesus Christ.”

When my mother laid dying, she named all eight of her children from the oldest to youngest, one by one. Then she said to me: “I love all my children but especially you because you are a servant of Jesus Christ.”



Today also as I write I heard from a family of one of my former parishes, “I thought of you when the Pope died this past week. We really miss you. Wish you could come back. You are in our prayers each day.”

The above few examples bring happiness to a priest. They come from people whom I never favored above others. They come from people I challenged often with strong words of truth.

If a priest is to be happy, if he is to assist individuals and families in being happy, he must teach the fullness of faith regarding the above matters mentioned in this pamphlet and all those concerning faith and morals. The priest who reaches out to help others in need and preaches strongly for love of souls and family life, which is what parents and children need to hear – that priest will be happy. The priest, who hears of a husband or wife having problems in their marriage and immediately suggests that an annulment is possible, rather than working to understand the root cause and direct the husband and wife to the solution, is not acting in harmony with God’s laws and the Church’s teachings. He will not find happiness in the priesthood because he is not living it. Had I not taught what the Church requires and caused souls to leave, or not taught what God wanted of families and caused families to suffer and break up, I could never have been happy. The positive fruits of his labor contribute tremendously to the happiness of a priest.

## The Church is rooted in Jesus Christ and the family

The Church is profoundly rooted in the family. It has long used the terminology of the family for priest and religious; father, mother, sister, brother.... The priest therefore must act as a true father would act. If a problem is out of his competence, he should send people to those who can help them but make certain those people will also act and teach in harmony with Jesus Christ and His Church.

Unfortunately I’ve heard of some priests too engaged in things of the world rather than in a life of sacrifice and penance. “Unless you take up your cross and follow me ....” Penance and sacrifice are important to a healthy Christian family and to each priest. He must practice what he preaches.

The priest must have a solid Priestly Spiritual Program which he practices each day and from which there is never a vacation.

Pope John Paul II was called a “People’s Pope.” A good priest should be a “People’s Priest” - one who is concerned about their needs and knows the problems and challenges of his people. Jesus said, “I know mine and mine know Me.”

If our priests would all act and teach as real Catholic priests, the crisis the Church faces, the crisis the family faces, could end and rather rapidly.

## The Eucharist

One’s entire priesthood is orientated to our Eucharistic Lord, and this calling, which is his, must be reflected in the demeanor by which he offers the greatest work on earth. The Catholic Church is the Church of the Eucharist and the priesthood is for the Eucharist. A priest whose faith is daily active in offering holy Mass, conscious that he is perpetuating Christ’s Sacrifice of the Cross and effecting the Real Presence of our Lord, will be happy as this is his chief mission in life. Not only will he be happy, he will draw others to a deeper appreciation of

Christ's true presence in the Eucharist. This is the greatest advertisement for the priesthood. Simple is it not? You can dispense with all the entertainment, just let them experience Holy Mass celebrated by a holy and believing priest, and they will come and they will stay, for they will have experienced Christ through the actions of His holy priest.

## Conclusion

It is important for seminarians and young priests to remember:

1. You cannot teach what you don't know.
2. Sometimes we do not know that we don't know.
3. To counter the first two problems, we must be open to those who hold positions that differ to our own. We must learn to question and listen and analyze. Remember their fruits are a good indicator as to whether to take them seriously or not.
4. We must study and learn from authors who are faithful to the teachings of Holy Mother Church. We should also read material put out by faithful lay people, always remembering the phrase, "By their fruits you will know them". People who are successful do not live like those who are failures. Today success is in the minority, so you will have to help people be different in a positive way. Remember, if you don't lift your people up they will most certainly pull you down, and you will never be a *happy priest*.