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We are extremely grateful to Fr. Fox for writing this pamphlet for Christian Family Outreach. Father's many years of dedicated service to the people God entrusted to him not only aided his people, it gave to him a fulfilled life and made of him, a truly happy priest.

The saying: "It is in giving that you receive", fits the dedicated priest perfectly. When the priest forgets self, and throws himself with love into the needs and activities of his parish, he receives love and cooperation in return.

We are living in confusing times. Much like the parents in the home, who are being pulled by the world to seek their own gratification at the expense of the family, so too is the priest pulled by the world to pursue his own enjoyments at the expense of his parish. In both cases, the ones who need love and guidance are left to the ravages of a cunning and ungodly world — a world that takes advantage of the unprepared. Yes, the world can truly be compared to a roaring lion seeking every opportunity to devour those who are uninformed and left unprotected by God's chosen guides and shepherds.

The world never tires. It is always ready to assume the role of teacher and advisor. Priests and parents alike must be courageous in their fight for the souls in their charge.

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# The Priest: A Man for Others

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By Robert J. Fox

[The Author wrote the following upon learning he had bone cancer].

“The Catholic Priest is a Man for Others.” That was the lesson I learned my first days in college seminary. The word was out. The Benedictine Abbot would call each of us, one by one, to his office. We all knew that he always asked: “Young man, why do you want to be a priest?” I was prepared. I wrote my answer on paper, memorized it, kept it in my shirt pocket for two weeks. Several times a day I recited the answer to ingrain it in my memory. It was dramatic enough to make the angels sing, or at least weep.

One day in study hall I was tapped on the shoulder. “The Abbot will see you now.” I was at that moment every bit as enthralled as if I were meeting the Pope himself. I relaxed entirely when the Abbot’s interest was captivated by my being a farm boy who knew how to work, and that I was from an area where his abbey farm did business with a cattle pavilion near my South Dakota farm home. “Ah! I get off easy without that question,” I thought. Suddenly he pointed his finger at me and loudly demanded: “Young man, why do you want to be a priest?” My memorized answer was gone with the wind. I stammered, “There are many little reasons.” “Ah! Many little reasons” - “Yes, Father Abbot, many little reasons.” His interest returned to farms and cattle, and I relaxed again.

Time passed quickly with such relaxing conversation. Then he abruptly pointed that finger of his at me again, demanding in a loud voice: “Young man! Tell me one of those little reasons.” The answer that came from my lips utterly astonished me. I replied: “I’ve always been fond of sanctity and I would like to see it in other people.”

**“Very good, young man. One does not have to be a priest to save his soul. A married man can save his soul. The priesthood is for others; to glorify God and work to save souls, many souls.”**

As a priest now nearly fifty-four years I have found no better answer to the question than the one that popped into my teenage head the day the Abbot put me under severe scrutiny. I knew as a lad, that a priest’s work must go on until death.

## **The Loyal Priest Never Retires**

“There’s no such thing as a retired priest.” That is what a document from the Vatican said the very week the bishop sent me a letter of acceptance of my resignation from pastoral ministries. I wrote the resignation letter in obedience to my Bishop who requested it as I was nearing fifty years in priestly ministry. I took a vow of obedience the day I was ordained so I had to obey him. I began my letter of resignation by stating that I was writing my letter according to his request. When people of my last parish wanted to descend upon the chancery, requesting a reversal of his decision, I begged them not to do so out of respect for the bishop and his authority. God writes straight with crooked lines. You see, since “retirement”, I’ve been serving as an extra priest for more than five years at the internationally known Shrine of the Most Blessed Sacrament founded by Mother Angelica. I offer the holy Sacrifice of the Mass daily in the lower church of this Shrine, where pilgrims come from all over the world. When Mother Vicar heard I was freed from my five decades of pastoral ministry, she phoned to invite me to offer Mass at the Hanceville, Alabama Shrine; the Bishop of Birmingham at the same time gave me a gracious welcome to his diocese. Obedience to the bishop, however painful, led me from South Dakota to Alabama and has given me more opportunities to evangelize and touch other souls as a priest. Opportunities to evangelize and perform priestly services at eighty plus years are greater now than in my earlier years as a priest. For this I am grateful to Mother Angelica and her sacrificial life and her Poor Clare Nuns.

My priestly experiences during these years of “retirement” have been so full that with my 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary

of ordination I began to keep a journal, frequently registering experiences at the end of the day. I was so pleased that my 50<sup>th</sup> coincided exactly with Pope Benedict XVI's inauguration. Priests, who come to the Shrine to spend some days in spiritual retreat, often discover this old white-haired priest just down the road from the Monastery. They often come to visit with me to receive spiritual advice and Confession.

### *Each Person is Unique*

**The priest must see each person as unique, made in the image and likeness of God and he must LOVE each person and be willing to serve him with Truth. The respected Swiss Theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar wrote: “Only a philosophy of freedom and love can account for our existence. Thus, the dignity of human existence can only be adequately understood “in terms of love — and not in terms of consciousness, or spirit, or knowledge, or power, or desire, or usefulness.” Each of us, the priest in particular, has a vocation to love, to serve. Popes have called themselves “the Servant of the servants of God.”**

As I write, a twenty-eight-year-old man from another state, knocks on my door and says, “I want to make a General Confession of my entire life to you before I leave and I'll be preparing for that these next days here at the Shrine. You see I used to be a Methodist. I'm a lawyer, but I became a Catholic five years ago. I want to make that Confession before I enter the seminary to study for the priesthood.” I replied: “You remind me of my bishop of the Diocese of Sioux Falls. Bishop Paul Swain was a Methodist as a youth, became a lawyer, then discovered the fullness of Catholic faith, finally studied for the priesthood and a couple years ago ordained a bishop. Write to ask him to pray for your vocation.” After a few days this young lawyer-seminarian made a beautiful general confession of his entire life to me and chose to do so softly in the lower Church before the Most Blessed Sacrament. He is on fire with love for our Eucharistic Lord and the Catholic Church. “What led you to the Catholic Church?” I asked. “The Eucharist. You see I was an usher for a Catholic wedding and the priest announced that only Catholics spiritually prepared may receive Holy Communion. I became angry at that priest. I went home and began to study Catholic teachings to try and understand what made the Catholic Church so exclusive with its Eucharist. The more I studied, the more I discovered that the Catholic Church possesses the Real Presence of Our Lord, God and Savior. And that Christ's Sacrifice of the Cross is perpetuated at Mass. I discovered ‘Why?’ the priest made that announcement, and it led me to embrace Catholicism. I am impressed that when one becomes steeped in history, one ceases to be Protestant.” The glow and love for Jesus in this lawyer stirred up anew my own love for our Eucharistic Lord and we shared profoundly with each other this mystery of faith. I told him, “If that priest had been wimpy and soft-pedaled the truth, you wouldn't be here for Confession and going off to the Seminary.”

It seems to me the work of a priest must always be to use every opportunity, even create opportunities, to evangelize, and to direct souls to Jesus Christ and the true faith in Catholicism, without compromise. The gentle easy answers to make people feel good about any situation or moral question only drives souls away from Christ's true Church. “The truth will set you free.” (Jn 8:32). Some priests want to be nice and water down the truth, but it only drives souls from Christ. “Because he spoke this way, many came to believe in Him. Jesus then went on to say to those Jews who believed in Him: ‘If you live according to my teaching, you are truly my disciples; then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free’” (Jn 8:30-32).

### **The Eucharist Bringing Many to the True Faith**

I meet former Protestant ministers here who have converted to Catholicism by coming to this Shrine of the Most Blessed Sacrament. They see what it is all about, adoration of the Real Presence of Jesus Christ. They have a special gleam in their eyes when they meet an ordained Catholic priest, for their conversion tells them of the ontological change in the soul of an ordained priest; that is, the indelible character of Christ the high priest, and the powers of the priesthood to forgive sin, to consecrate at Mass, etc. Experiencing the great power coming

from the Most Blessed Sacrament in the seven and a half foot monstrance over the high-altar in the upper church of the Shrine is often the occasion for non-Catholics to pause, consider, meditate and study Catholicism. When the priest is fearless, and bold in proclaiming these truths, souls are touched and converted. What a pity, a tragedy that some ministers drawn by grace to the Catholic Church have heard priests discourage their conversion. Such priests can hardly have the fullness of true faith themselves. They will have much to answer for. Read again Jn-8 above. I call the lower church where I offer daily Mass “my underground church.” Just outside the door of the chapel is the exact replica of the Holy Shroud of Turin. Up to 50% of the people who visit this Shrine are not Catholic. I have occasions to explain a little of the sufferings reflected on this miraculous image of Christ Crucified. I point out “That this sacrifice is perpetuated at the altar just inside the lower church here and I’m reminded of that daily as I pass this replica of the Holy Shroud to go offer the Sacrifice of the Mass.” Eyes open wide and expressions of awe follow when I say such things. There are so many opportunities for priests to reach out to others if only they would take Christ Jesus Himself as their Model and not consider the priesthood a mere job for their bread and butter. Priests should use every opportunity to teach, lead, and direct others to the *Living Bread Come Down from heaven (John 6)*.

Over the many years as a priest of God, about 200 of the young men who have gone with me on pilgrimage to Europe, especially Fatima for thirteen days at a time, have become priests, besides the young ladies who entered solid religious communities, especially contemplative ones. This is a result of the action of the Holy Spirit, and any priest can be used as an instrumental of Christ in drawing souls to the faith. Mary introduced these young men on pilgrimage at Fatima to her Son, Jesus Christ the High Priest, to consider and respond to a priestly vocation: “Come follow me.” Unfortunately some priests consider Fatima just a sentimental or even exaggerated devotion. Not so! Pius XII who spoke of Fatima as “a reaffirmation of the Gospels” as have all Popes since. Pope John Paul II, the “Totus Tuus” Fatima Pope, certainly did not consider Fatima sentimental, but attributed to Our Lady of Fatima intervention to stop the would-be assassin’s bullets that May 13, anniversary of Our Lady’s first appearance there, when the shots rang out in St. Peter’s Square.

I was a pastor for over forty-eight years before “retirement.” As I write this article, by request, I am still editor of the *Immaculate Heart Messenger* founded nearly twenty-five years ago. Since “retirement”, I’ve found time to write several books including: *Messages from the Heart of Our Mother* and *Masculinity: the Gentle Man*. Upon request I also wrote an autobiography of my life, *A Priest is a Priest Forever*. That book is to interest young men in the priesthood and to encourage priests. If our hearts are on fire, we want to share this fire with others.

**Recently I wrote my last book. Mother Angelica wrote the preface to this book: *EUCCHARIST: HEAVEN & EARTH UNITE* - about 350 pages. I joyfully finished it. Then I learned I had bone cancer.**

**When the doctor told me I had bone cancer, I responded with joy. I told people at the following Sunday Mass my intent was that God would permit me to use this bone cancer to touch even more souls – and God-willing to be able to radiate Jesus Christ to many. Perhaps that is what motivated Christian Family Outreach to ask me to write this pamphlet.**

**I am not sad at having cancer. I rather smile at death. Why? Where did death come from? The devil succeeded in his temptation in the garden. The fall of man in Genesis 3 reports Adam and Eve were not to eat of the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden. God said, “You shall not eat it or even touch it, lest you die.” Jesus Christ outwitted the devil and by His own death on the Cross gained for us eternal life. And the “Woman” we know to be Mary was mentioned in the great promise of redemption (Genesis 3:15). She who through the Holy Spirit gave us Jesus Christ, is the Mother of Vocations and must be deeply involved in the life of every priest who truly lives his priestly vocation for others. Therefore, he will speak often of Mary; if he does not, he must not love her much. If he does not love Mary exceedingly, he loves Jesus Christ less.**

A few years ago, I was walking across the piazza from the Shrine of the Most Blessed Sacrament when

a man and his wife, who were not Catholic, expressed appreciation for my little book, *A YOUNG CATHOLIC'S APOLOGY FOR THE FAITH*. I wrote it especially for teenagers, but young adults, and some older adults, find it helpful. "What got you started toward the Catholic Church?" I asked, it was "the Eucharist." They had originally come to the Shrine as sight-seers. Witnessing their first Catholic Mass, they listened intently. Then they walked into the lobby, looked at each other and said: "This is the true Church." Having to undergo RCIA they said: "It was painful, awaiting to receive Jesus." Now they are influencing their grandchildren to Catholicism.

As I write this pamphlet, each Wednesday evening seven non-Catholics come to my home for two hours to discuss the Catholic faith. One of these is a young man, seventeen years, 6'2", very intelligent. I detected a glow in his person and have spent additional private time with him. He now comes to Mass. Who knows? A future priest? Another comes who is sixteen; most are middle aged. I direct them to formal ordered classes under a parish.

Recently my doctor, the same doctor who told me I have bone cancer, informed me that his father was dying in the hospital from cancer. Would I call on his father and bring to him the sacraments of the Church? As a volunteer "retired" priest here at the Shrine I am not a pastor. But this request I felt I must fulfill. I got someone to drive me to the hospital as I held the Eucharistic Christ near my heart. We prayed the Rosary along the way. I administered the Sacraments as solemnly as possible with family members present. When I finished the old man, filled with cancer, was happy and smiling. I said to him: "COURAGE." As we returned home my driver said, "What wonders would happen in the Church if all priests responded like this toward souls!" The man died a little over a week later. The doctor, who bears the same name as his father, seemed devastated. I gave him the book, "A Priest is a Priest Forever." "Read it. It will help you."

Recently, a seminarian told me of a priest friend now taking a year's leave of absence. My heart flared up and I said, "There is no such thing as a leave-of-absence from the priesthood. It is eternal. Here, give him this booklet I wrote, *How to be a Happy Priest*. Tell him I said, 'Get with it.'" Recently in talking to non-Catholics open to the Church, I spoke of Peter the Rock (Mt. 16:13-19) and the institution of the Eucharist (Mt. 26:26-30, also Mark, Luke ). Then we studied in detail John 6, as we also recalled the meaning of Old Testament Passover and its relation to the Eucharistic Sacrifice of the New Testament. Should not a priest always be evangelizing while not compelling, but inviting, reaching out, instructing in joyful love? A priest should not simply wait in his office or at the altar for people to come to him. Jesus went out to the people and commissioned his Apostles in the same way. A priest is a man for others, to bring them to God-in, with, and through Jesus Christ. For nearly fifty years I taught religion in the classrooms, grades first thru twelfth, once each week. I wanted to make sure they got the basics. No time? Come on! Do it, and if you spend time before Jesus in the Eucharist, you'll find your work accomplishments and the touching of souls will be multiplied many times over.

As I near the end of this article, a letter comes from a man who says he has been at my Mass a few times, talked to me a couple times,..."but I feel as though I know you as a close friend for a long time." He was amazed that I declined his sympathy for the cancer issue recently, but rather expressed joy as we must die from something. I did not realize my words were affecting him deeply, but his letter was profound as he is among those who say to priests: "Thank you for your priesthood."

There is a couple who drives about fifty miles to my Mass. They share with me their pro-life work and often I hear: "We saved another baby yesterday before the abortion clinic. We talked to that woman for two hours. She realized what she had intended to do." I share their joy in sparing another sacred human life just as I rejoice when I meet parents of large families whose sacrifices I so admire.

Many priests are extremely busy due to the shortage of priests. Many work hard. My mother who lived with me said: "I did not know how many things a priest does all week until I came to live with you." As she was dying she said: "I love all my children, but especially you because you are a servant of Jesus Christ." I deeply

appreciate it when good lay people meet me, and other priests, and greet us with: “Thank you for being a priest. Thank you for giving us Jesus.”

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## The Coach

Vince Lombardi, one of the greatest coaches ever, once said, “The quality of a person’s life is in direct proportion to their commitment to excellence, regardless of their chosen field of endeavor.” The coach leads, directs and motivates his people to be the best they can be. The coach, if he is truly dedicated, gets his people to achieve their God-given potential --- anything short of this is not acceptable.

The faithful priest is a coach also. He brings out the best in the people God has entrusted to him. He, like the good coach, goes out to his people and sees their potentials as well as their weaknesses, and then, corrects and encourages them.

One priest that I know who exemplifies this image is Father Robert J. Fox. Fr. Fox has led so many people to the Church through his ability to teach and bring out the best in them. He has influenced many priests also, and some have become great coaches themselves. Father has led many youth on pilgrimages and taught them the importance of love and reverence for Christ, Mary and the Church.

Today, we need more priests like Father Fox, priests who live their priesthood in service to Christ by dedicating themselves to the well-being of their people, both spiritual as well as in the family. Fr. Fox understands that families, who abandon the traditional family lifestyle and adopt modern practices, have little chance of success.

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