
The Jubilee Year for Priests began on the solemn feast of the Sacred Heart, Friday, June 19, 2009, and will conclude on that same feast day, June 11, 2010. Pope Benedict XVI desired that the year might mean the deepening of commitment of all priests in building up the Kingdom and in radiating God's love. The pope also intended that the role and mission of the priest might be more clearly perceived by all the faithful.

During this celebratory year, as a priest I hear the call to be reflective about my living of this vocation and its witness and mission. The past decade or more has not been an easy one for us who are priests. In the United States, Canada, and Ireland particularly, the child sex-abuse cases have cast a dark shadow over a large segment of church ministers.

Whether correctly perceived or not, it seems that some bishops may have been more eager to save face than to care for the alleged priest-offenders or deal personally with the identified victims. Many priests have felt the distance to be a chasm between themselves and the bishops with whom they work. As a religious priest, I have been graced always to have religious superiors who exercise loyalty and personal care for everyone of us in good times and in bad.



Then there is the continuing controversy about priestly ordination for women. Although there is a church position that this is not a matter for study or discussion, the question, especially in view of the practice of many Christian churches, remains. For many of us priests, it is hard dealing with good and holy women who feel reduced to a secondary status in the church's life and mission. Their pain, disappointment, and sometimes anger at the church authorities' dismissing of the ordination question touches us and leaves us with only compassion to offer.

But how do I celebrate as priest? The heart of my celebration is the Eucharist. How wonderful that by priestly ordination I am designated to lead the community in our giving ourselves together with Christ to God the Father and to one another and all our brothers and sisters. This repeated act of surrender expressed in every Mass speaks out the meaning and direction of all our lives. What a privilege in the Liturgy of the Word to try to relate the word of God—empowering and enlightening—to our everyday lives! The *action* of the Eucharist allows for no controversy.

Then there are the sacraments celebrating significant moments in people's lives—their marriage, the baptism of children and adults into Christ, the forgiveness of sin in reconciliation, and the anointing at times of serious illness and at death. Mary has been described as “the reed of God,” and I as a priest am meant to be a similar conduit for God and God's action at these special times. All the incidental moments of presence and conversation often become truly sacramental in my priestly role and function. This is how I minister; this is how I serve. Like the risen Christ inviting us to share in his joy of victory, I seek to share my joy of being gifted as priest.

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