

Fr. Tom's Celestial Musings

The Year of the Priesthood

Part 1: The Beginning of the Year of the Priesthood¹

Exactly one week after my 10th anniversary of priesthood, Pope Benedict commenced the beginning of the “Year of the Priesthood” (June 19, 2009). For the next twelve months, Christians throughout the world will have special opportunities to reflect on the important role that ordained priests have in the Church, as well as each baptized believer’s participation in the priesthood of Christ. According to Pope Benedict, the purpose of this special year dedicated to the priesthood is to encourage the spiritual perfection of Catholic priests. The pope hopes that the year will awaken in priests a new desire to live the radical lifestyle of Christ and thus be more effective ministers.

One important part of the celebration of the “Year of the Priesthood” will be the pope’s declaration of Saint John Vianney as the patron saint of *all* priests. This saint is currently the patron saint of *parish* priests, but through the declaration he would be elevated, as it were, to being a universal example of exemplary priestly identity and service. The pope’s declaration will also mark the 150th anniversary of St. John Vianney’s death.

Pope Benedict hopes that this special year will be an opportunity for all of us to remember the important role that priests serve in salvation history. The pope is especially mindful of the fact that without the ordained priesthood there would be no Eucharist, which the Church calls the “source and summit” of the spiritual life. By virtue of the centrality of the Eucharist for our faith, the priesthood is essential to Christ’s plan of salvation.

In highlighting the importance of the ordained priesthood, the Pope hopes that this special year will also serve as a caution for the Church against creating organizations or ministries that intend to try to take the place of ordained ministry. For several decades, the shortage of priests in some parts of the world has served as a temptation to shift various ministries to laity. The pope hopes that the “Year of the Priesthood” will remind the Church that the shortage of ordained priests must be primarily addressed through promoting new vocations and sustaining existing vocations as opposed to assuming that the day will come when there are no more priests.

In the Diocese of Little Rock, this special year gives us an opportunity to celebrate the abundance of men who are studying for the priesthood in our state. It is a reminder that we must support them and continue to encourage other men to consider a vocation to the priesthood. That encouragement begins at home, but also includes how we worship at Mass and celebrate our faith, and how we support young people through their difficult teenage years.

Throughout the next year, I will be writing a series of articles on the priesthood. I am going to be sharing a lot of material from a wonderful book by Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen, entitled, [The Priest Is Not His Own](#). I hope that it will give all of us an opportunity to reflect on the unique and beautiful vocation of priesthood, as well as reflect on the priestly identity that is inherent in all Christians through baptism.

Over the next twelve months, let us pray in a very special way for priests and seminarians. I encourage all of us to make a special spiritual pledge of prayer for priests and vocations, a pledge beyond the prayers we are already currently offering. This might include praying the Rosary or the Divine Mercy Chaplet for priests once a week for the next 52 weeks. Or, we might choose to fast one day a week from something we love. Regardless of what we choose to do, I can speak on behalf of all priests in saying, “Thank you!” for your continued prayers and support!

¹ In honor of the “Year of the Priesthood,” announced by Pope Benedict, this is part 1/12 part series on the priesthood