

Fr. Tom's Celestial Musings

The Year of the Priesthood

Part 12: Recommendations from Saint Alphonsus¹

Last year, a friend of mine sent me an article that he had come across in The Priest magazine. The article, entitled, “Saint Alphonsus and Priests,” was written by Donnell L. Kirchner, C.Ss.R. and explains ten important goals that Saint Alphonsus had set for himself as a young man preparing for priesthood in the third century. Despite the fact that eighteen centuries have passed since he died, the wisdom of Saint Alphonsus is pertinent for priests today. Reflecting on his recommendations is a wonderful way for us to finish our celebration of the Year of the Priesthood. Not only do these ten suggestions offer guidance for priests, they are also very applicable to lay people and religious.

1. **Associate with holy priests.** Not only is it important for us to associate with people who share our values, but having spiritual, faith-filled, holy friends can be a tremendous source of encouragement and inspiration.
2. **Do a holy hour every day.** Prayer is our lifeline to God. If we are not spending a non-negotiable amount of time in prayer every day, then our relationship with God will quickly dry up. A standard amount of time in prayer for priests is an hour a day. When we think we cannot afford that much time, we are reminded of the words of St. Francis de Sales, “Pray a half hour each day, unless you're busy. If you're busy, you should pray an hour.”
3. **Devotion to the Blessed Sacrament.** The Church tells us that the Eucharist is the “source and summit” of the spiritual life. It must remain central to the life of priests, as well as all Christians. To foster such centrality, we might choose to attend daily Mass, spend time in Eucharistic Adoration, offer the prayer for spiritual communion, etc.
4. **Read spiritual books.** Spiritual reading is essential to the life of a priest because it helps him to stay connected with important spiritual concepts and movements in his own life. It also helps provide material for his preaching and teaching. It is a wonderful way for all of us to connect with the men and women who have walked the spiritual journey before us and have great insights to share with us.
5. **Devotion to Mary.** While Mary is not God and is never worshipped, she is a *wonderful* spiritual guide and example. There are many ways that we can foster a relationship with Mary, including frequent recitation of the Rosary and reflecting on her Magnificat.
6. **Taking care of our reputation.** With all of the priest scandals that have surfaced in recent times, this particular recommendation from St. Alphonsus is very appropriate. Following this suggestion requires a prudence that is void of the scrupulosity that keeps us from authentic relationships.
7. **Being mindful of our speech.** One of the things that can cause the greatest scandal and ruin one's reputation is immodest or imprudent speech. Avoiding not only the use of inappropriate language, but also questionable jokes, pervasive negativism, and gossip are essential for every Christian.
8. **Respect for one's superiors.** One of the evangelical councils of the priesthood is obedience. It is impossible to be obedient unless a person respects his or her superiors. There are few opportunities to grow in genuine holiness like lovingly submitting one's will to obedience.
9. **Being well kept.** While we are often told that it is what *inside* a person that matters, the truth of the matter is that our outward appearance is a reflection of what is on the inside. If we are dirty, unkempt, and wearing threadbare clothes, then there are probably some inner issues that have not been taken care of.
10. **Confession.** It is recommended that priests go to confession regularly. I think a reasonable definition of “regularly” would be once a month. This hold true not only for priests, but for everyone. The Sacrament of Reconciliation helps to keep us accountable to numbers 1-9 listed above!

I want to thank all of you for your special prayers during the last year. Even though the Year of the Priesthood is coming to an end, I humbly ask that all of you continue to keep priests in your daily prayers. I have personally felt the power of those prayers in my life and they make all the difference!

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