

## **Christmas brings closeness to the Lord**

Parents of young men interested in the seminary worry often that their sons might be lonely. Their concerns are valid ones, not because priests actually report loneliness (studies show that priests oftentimes experience 'less' loneliness than married men), but because priests are obviously asked to sacrifice the natural closeness that comes through having a wife and children. What does the Lord offer to men that He calls to 'make up' for the sacrificed intimacy that is inherent in a good marriage?

Christmas is a special time when we celebrate the closeness of the Lord to each one of us. We celebrate that through the Lord's birth in Bethlehem, there is no 'chasm' between heaven and earth, between divinity and humanity. They have been united through the mystery of the Incarnation. Because of Christmas, each of us has a chance to be saved from the 'illusion' that God is distant and that ultimately each one of us is alone. Atheists challenge us all the time as to how we can believe in a God that can seem so distant from a world that needs His presence. Christmas is our proclamation that the Lord's presence does make a huge difference in the world, if only we don't fail to contemplate how close He has come by being born among us! Because of Christmas, we know that the Lord is as close to each one of us as we are to ourselves.

Ultimately, each one of us has come from God and will return to God. That is why we are to love Him above all things, and to look to Him in an exclusive way to be the cure for any loneliness that afflicts us. Through the gift of the priesthood, the Lord invites men to a special closeness to Him that really can satisfy the deepest hungers of the human heart. First, a priest worships regularly the Creator who knows how we are made better than we do ourselves. Second, a priest, as He is called to be the presence of Christ in the world, is a sign that the Lord Jesus is much, much closer to the world than people think He is. Thirdly, as a man whose life is centered on the Eucharist, He celebrates often the sacred mystery of how we become one flesh, one spirit with Christ, inseparably united to Him, as we eat His body and drink His blood. In all these ways, a priest has an opportunity for a deep conversation and friendship with Christ, who is the lasting source of true intimacy for every person.

Don't be afraid of loneliness! Give Christ the opportunity to be everything He has promised to be for you! Follow Him as closely as you can, strengthened by the knowledge of His closeness to you through the Christmas mystery. Merry Christmas to all from the Vocation Office!