

Priesthood is a gift, not a career choice

Do not be afraid! Follow me! I will make you fishers of men! These are the exhortations

Jesus gave to the apostles. It is a calling that he continues to make to young men today through his church.

A priest is a man set apart especially to do two things: to consecrate the Eucharist and to forgive sins. Actually, this second “power” of the priest to forgive sins contributes to his power to consecrate the Eucharist, since in forgiving sins the priest is preparing a soul to receive the Eucharist more fruitfully.

At every moment of his life, the priest, then, is either consecrating the Eucharist or drawing people to the

Eucharist. In other words, he is either making Christ present or preparing souls for a living encounter with Jesus Christ. These powers flow not from the merits of the priest, but through the gifts that Christ bestows on those whom he personally loves and chooses.

The best reason to become a priest is always this call, or this gift, that flows from a young man’s personal relationship with Jesus. Because God has also gifted us with real freedom, the priesthood is also a choice that a young man makes over and against the other options available to him.

Yet our choices are always secondary to God’s choosing us. Jesus speaks in this way: “It was not you who

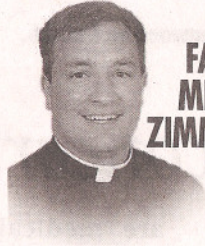
chose me, but I who chose you, and appointed you to go out and to bear fruit in my name, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he will give you” (Jn 15:16). Thus, fundamentally, a priest is not one who chooses but one who is chosen. Jesus generously gives the gift of the priesthood to those he chooses to build an eternal kingdom. Priests proclaim the truth that God our loving Father has fulfilled every promise he has made and has given us everything through his only Son!

When I was eight years old, I told everyone that I wanted to be an NFL football player. This was my choice at that time, but thankfully, as it turns out, it was not the gift that God had chosen for me. As a church, we see potential in the young men of our communities to do many things with their

lives, and once we identify their gifts, we will sacrifice much time, energy and many resources to develop these gifts.

If we see the priesthood as a gift that Jesus wants to generously give to young men in our archdiocese, we will do a better job of sacrificing today to cultivate that gift and to make sure that there is an abundant harvest! If priesthood is unfortunately seen only as a choice, it will continue to get pushed back and receive the status of a last resort within the jungle of career possibilities.

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