



From the Pastor
22nd Sunday in
Ordinary Time - A
September 3, 2023

PRAY FOR PRIESTLY PRESIDERS. Reflection #11 on *Pope Francis' 2022 Apostolic Letter, 'Desiderio Desideravi,'* Latin for *Jesus' pre-Last Supper* words: *"I have*

earnestly desired [to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.]" [Luke 22:15] notes the challenges **Ordained Ministers** who lead our **Sacred Rites** face, and for which they need our prayers. For past articles in this series on the three-year **National Eucharistic Revival** [this is article #40!] and the **Holy Father's Letter**, visit our **Parish** website.

AN 'ALTER CHRISTUS' OR ANOTHER CHRIST.

While **Baptism** makes each **Christian** an **'Alter Christus'** or **Another Christ**, those called to lead the **Church** by receiving the gift of **Sacred Orders** in the **Sacrament of Holy Orders** face additional challenges. **Ordained Ministers** are both sheep and shepherd: we follow **Jesus** as His disciples, and lead the flock entrusted to our care. One main reality we must constantly remember is that the flock does NOT belong to us; they are not ours to do with as we believe they should be led. They, like us, belong to the **Lord**; we must lead them into **His Way** and **Truth** and **Life**, not ours. This challenge plays out in various ways.

First, our calling does not come from the flock whom we serve; it comes from **God**; it is a gift and a responsibility we receive from the **Holy Spirit** who equips us for the task. As **Pope Francis** bluntly notes: *"In visiting Christian communities, I have noticed that their way of living the liturgical celebration is conditioned - for better or, unfortunately, for worse - by the way in which their pastor presides in the assembly."* Presiders must be constantly alert to any of their actions or behaviors that might take the focus off the **Lord** and onto themselves.

Second, while each priestly presider has unique talents and charisms which he is to employ in his leadership role, these, too, must be reined in by the rubrics set forth by the **Church**. Without being rigidly ruled by the rubrics, which often leads to a mechanical or almost robotic form of presiding, he cannot be so annoyingly creative that he becomes, for lack of better words, 'the star of the show!' And while the styles and

modes of theatrical acting also apply, to a certain extent, to liturgical presiders, the **holy Mass** is not a 'play' to be 'performed.' The **Holy Father** adds that the 'dramatic flare' is often evident when **Rites** are transmitted over the air or online, a COVID-time need he says must be reconsidered, lest we give people the excuse to be spectators rather than participants. It makes me think of the many broadcasted **non-Catholic Services**, like the televangelists, who sometimes turn sacred worship into a circus or a fundraiser.

Third, the **Pope's Letter** reminds those who have been called to lead the faithful of their duty to provide what the people rightfully expect. **Homilies** should be reasonably succinct, based on the Scriptures and/or event being celebrated, and helpful in living out the **Christian** life. While the **Sacred Rites** should never be drawn out, neither should they be rushed or hurried. And without being overly consumed with doing everything 'liturgically proper' or 'right,' presiders must strive to be faithful to what has been 'handed onto us' so that we can faithfully hand on our traditions to the next generation.

This demands that those who accept the call to lead the assembly continue to be formed in the latest developments of **Sacred Liturgy**; what began in seminary formation must be built upon! Like all other professionals, continual education and renewal are essential! However, this works both ways: many presiders are tempted to 'throw in the towel' because of those who want - or even demand - that we do everything "the way it used to be" in "the good old days." **Pope Francis** expressed the personal pain he experiences from those who want NO development in **Liturgy** - and those who make up their OWN **Rites**.

LOVE. An image the **Pope** used that I found most powerful is this: *"It is as if [the Priest is] placed in the middle between Jesus' burning heart of love and the heart of each of the faithful, which is the object of the Lord's love. To preside at Eucharist is to be plunged into the furnace of God's love."* What a beautiful way to see what I, as a **Priest**, am so privileged to do so often with you: unite you, sacramentally, with **Jesus**! Pray that I may be faithful and fruitful in my ministry.

In His holy Name,

Very Rev. Thomas J. Serafin, VF, KCHS