

Let Us Love One Another

By Bishop Richard G. Lennon

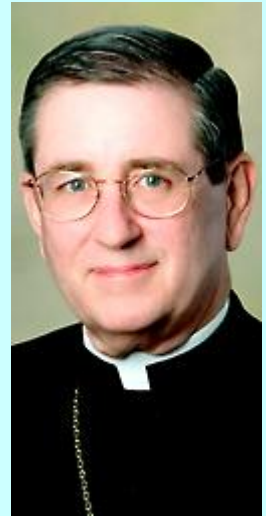
'Year of the Priest' encourages all to pray for, encourage vocations in next generation

On this past March 16 our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI met with the members of the Congregation for the Clergy. He used this setting to announce a special "Year of the Priest" that will begin next Friday, June 19, the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and will conclude on the same date in 2010.

Benedict XVI wishes to have this special year for priests for several reasons. With regard to priests themselves he envisions this as an opportunity for them "to encourage the striving for spiritual perfection....on which, above all, the effectiveness of their ministry depends."

With regard to the Catholic Faithful, Benedict envisions this special year as an opportunity to deepen appreciation that on the night Jesus was betrayed He instituted the ministerial priesthood, relating it so closely to the Eucharist, which the Second Vatican Council taught is the summit and source of life for the whole Church.

Our Holy Father has entitled this year: "The Faithfulness of Christ, the Faithfulness of the Priest." Wisely, he has focused first and foremost on Christ Himself, who was ever faithful adhering to the Will of His heavenly Father. And, it is into that faithfulness that a man is ordained 'priest' as he takes on in a special way the three-fold work of Christ: teacher, sanctifier, and leader. All of which is to be carried out in faithfulness, thus imitating fully and completely the faithfulness of Jesus Christ, "still, not my will but yours be done." (Luke 22:42)



This Year of the Priest provides all of us with an opportunity to thank God for providing for his Church through the Sacrament of Holy Orders for a ministerial priesthood. This gift of priesthood in a special way serves all the Faithful, so that all together the Church is built up as the Body of Christ.

Also, this upcoming year reminds us that God does provide for his people, and in fact for the world. He calls all to "come, follow me," and some are called to follow in ordained life. Even from the time of Jesus himself we are told to pray to the harvest master for workers to carry on the work of God on behalf of all people.

We know there are decreasing numbers of men presenting themselves for discernment and formation for the priesthood. This is true certainly here in the United States, in Canada, and in large parts of Europe. However, it is not true in Africa, in parts of Asia, and other places in the world. In fact, according to the information provided by the Vatican, the number of priests consistently continues to grow each year throughout the world!

I am personally convinced God is not being sparing in his call to priesthood. Rather, I believe that often times the call is not ever heard because of all the things going on in people's lives. Often times while there is some thought of having heard a call there is little or no support from family and friends to pursue that call.

This year focusing on priesthood and priests hopefully will heighten people's awareness that God's plan for salvation and holiness and our response to God and to neighbor very definitely embraces priesthood, especially as Jesus

said at the Last Supper to his Apostles "Do this in memory of me."

It is good for all of us to hear what Cardinal Claudio Hummes, Prefect of the Congregation of the Clergy, wrote in a letter regarding the Year of the Priest about vocations and our role: that the whole church should pay "...particular attention to the indispensable priority of the promotion of vocations to the ordained ministry." May this intention be part of our daily prayer, asking God to send more priestly laborers for the harvest.

Lastly, the Year of the Priest invites all of us to thank God for the wonderful priests we are blessed with here in the Diocese of Cleveland. God has been good to all of us by calling these men to "follow him" as priests. Also, we thank these priests for accepting the call to priesthood and for their faithfulness in serving God and the Faithful of Cleveland. Ad multos annos.

May we never take our priests for granted and may we always support them in our prayers, thoughts, and acts of assistance. Pope Benedict XVI has provided an excellent opportunity for us to reflect upon and act upon God's gift of ministerial priesthood in our lives in this Year of the Priest: The Faithfulness of Christ, the Faithfulness of the Priest. May we embrace this year in a way that will enrich our Catholic life throughout our Diocese.

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