

Dear Editor:

Every May, towards the end of the month, there occurs an extraordinary, beautiful, incredible event. It is nothing less than a miracle. All throughout the world, small groups of men bow down at the feet of Roman Catholic bishops and as those bishops utter a single phrase, a phrase that has been reechoed for thousands of years, these individuals kneel as mere men yet rise as priests of Jesus Christ.

So I now repeat the phrase that has brought so much love, so much hope into our world: “May God who has begun this good work in you now bring it into fulfillment.” These are the last words that a man will hear before he is ordained a Catholic priest.

It may appear to many that human flaws have overtaken this divine calling, that the priesthood is now corrupt, especially if we consider the recent sexual abuse scandal. Yet, through examining this calling itself we can aim to understand exactly what the Catholic priesthood is.

In my last editorial, I tried to present the nature of the Catholic sexual abuse scandal. Now, in the second of a three-part series, we will be examining the power of the priesthood to determine if the human flaws of priests are enough to take away from the divinity and unity of the Catholic Church.

A phrase that is commonly used to describe a priest is, in Latin, the *alter Cristus*, the other Christ. Through the eyes of a Catholic, a priest, whether by innate nature or the great vow that he has taken, has been given, through the sacrament of Holy Orders, the grace from God to administer the mysteries of Christ on Earth.

In the words of Saint Francis of Assisi, “If I met an angel of light and a drunken priest walking down the road, I would first kiss the priest’s hand and then greet the angel.”

Do not misunderstand me, Catholics believe that all beings can share in Christ’s love and in His

mission, but priests have the divine power, from the infinite grace of the Holy Spirit and of Jesus Himself, to be fishers of men and shepherds of souls.

Yet grace, like all things, is based on nature, and no matter how many graces God has offered a priest, if he does not faithfully accept those graces, God will not impede on his free will.

The hideous acts that ephebophilic priests have performed, and their bishop's lack of responsibility in handling them, do not speak against the divinity of their ordination; instead, it simply adds further proof to the fact that men are flawed and weak beings without God.

Although no Catholic can consent to blindly ignoring the dangerous acts of humans, we as a church, try to view our priests as God views them, not in their sins, but in their successes.

Many people will blame these illegal and immoral acts on, what they consider, a dogmatically strict law. It has been said that if priests were allowed to marry, then the church would no longer have problems such as the sexual abuse scandal.

In response to this I quote Christ's words in the Gospel of Saint Matthew. "Some are incapable of marriage because they were born so; some, because they were made so by others; some, because they have renounced marriage for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Whoever can accept this ought to accept this."

During times like these, the church does not need to be less Catholic; it needs to be more Catholic!

A priest truly acts and lives his existence, *in persona Christi capitis*, in the person of Christ, the head of the church. In all parts of the world, where there is a great need for love, where there is a thirst for Jesus Christ, the Catholic priesthood is evident and meaningful.

Yet a priest is not His own. Every gift that a priest has been given, every success that a priest

achieves, every soul that finds its way to heaven due to this sacred power, belongs not to man, but to God.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that, “Only Jesus is the true priest; the one who can offer sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins. Every other priest in the world simply shares in his priesthood.”

The church has never claimed that the nature of a priest is perfect, but we believe, truly and firmly, that the grace that Christ pours out on His priests, is infinite and without flaw.

This is not to say, that priests are without the ability to sin. The sex abuse scandal alone proves that many priests are not worthy of the great and supernatural call they have been given. Yet if the God-given gift of the Catholic priesthood is used prayerfully with accord to God’s holy will, souls will be brought to Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ will be brought to souls.

Contrary to the belief of late, the priesthood is, first and foremost, a life of sacrifice. A priest sacrifices the future possibility of an earthly spouse, and instead takes as a spouse the same bride of Christ, the church.

The purpose of a priest is not to dictate, or to rule, or to be placed in high esteem. Instead, the purpose of the priesthood is the same purpose of Christ, to serve. It has been said that the priesthood is the love of the heart of Jesus and although certain priests have chosen not to show that love, a call to the priesthood is a gift.

No matter what we do, we can do nothing to take away from the gifts God has given us. We can foolishly choose not to use God’s gifts, but that does not lead us to the conclusion that the gifts themselves have been removed. In the same manner, there are priests that have done terrible things and that do not use the gift of their priesthood, but this does not mean that the gift is no longer present.

I pray, that God may bring the work He has begun to fulfillment. I pray that priests be clothed with holiness, and I thank all the good and humble priests who have impacted this world,

through the love of Christ.

I will leave you with the words of Saint John Vianney, “ It is the priest who continues the work of redemption here on earth...What use would be a house filled with gold, were there no one to open its door? The priest holds the key to the treasures of heaven: it is he who opens the door: he is the steward of the good Lord; the administrator of His goods...Leave a parish for twenty years without a priest and they will end by worshipping the beasts there...The priest is not a priest for himself, he is a priest for you.” VIVA CRISTO REY!

Murphy Lierley

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