

Homily: 31st Sunday: Cycle A: 2023: Mal 1: 14- 2, 2. 8-10: Ps. 131: 1 Thes 2: 7-9. 13: Mt. 23: 1-12

“The Gift and the Sacred Responsibility of the Ordained Priesthood”

1. What a **gift** and a **responsibility** it is to be a spiritual shepherd of God’s flock, and kind of scary in light of the first reading from the prophet Malachi. The Lord through the prophet tells us what He expects His priests to act like in the Old Testament, and it applies even more in the New Testament when Jesus established the Catholic priesthood at the Last Supper, the First Holy Mass. **The basic point that the Lord is clearly trying to make is - *that the job of His priests is to lead and guide His people to Heaven.*** To teach God’s holy truth, in season and out of season, and even more importantly to live what you teach; not to be a hypocrite as a priest - to say one thing and do another is always a danger in life. **That is why we need your daily prayers!** We priests share in the same weak human nature. We run the gamut from the very holy to the worldly and everything in between. Pray we become very holy. At times, after I give a homily and think to myself: live it or you’re going to be listening to those homilies in Purgatory. It is not easy to live God’s teaching, as we all struggle in our wounded nature, but with God’s grace we can do it, lay and ordained alike.
2. **What are we to teach?** Not our opinion, but what has been handed down to us from the Apostles, protected by the Holy Spirit, which is **the Sacred Deposit of Faith.** The motive for our teaching as priests must be the love of people, spiritually speaking- trying to help each and every one of us to save our soul in the Lord, and not to be lost forever! This **spiritual charity** and **zeal** which should fill the heart of each priest is what motivates us to both console people and sometimes correct people who are not following the Lord’s objective way of truth and love. Of course this involves such things, *as reminding people of the need to participate in Holy Mass every Sunday and Holy Day of obligation; to confess one’s sins to the priest as God’s representative on a regular basis; to be fair and just and kind in our relations with others; to follow the Lord’s way in terms of the various areas of morality, e.g., concerning the end of life issues - rejecting euthanasia, the sanctity of human life in the womb - rejecting abortion; living a pure life: rejecting pornography, and contraception/sterilization and sexual sins of various sorts; not stealing or cheating others.* This means teaching

in accord with the Sacred Tradition of the Faith as is outlined in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Of course, our priestly job is to apply these teachings of our Faith to the daily circumstances and the particular temptations we face as individuals and as a community - this happens most frequently in the Sunday homily. So please pray all priests give good solid homilies that feed the faithful spiritually and help us to apply God's holy law in each aspect of our lives, so we can all grow in holiness.

3. To do all this well as a priest requires great patience, humility, and dedication.

St. Paul is a beautiful example of a holy priest. I think it is safe to say he is not bragging in the Second Reading today when he says, *"We were gentle among you, as a nursing mother cares for her children. With such affection for you, we were determined to share with you, not only the Gospel of God, but our very selves as well, so dearly beloved had you become to us. I can say the same in humble honesty, as a Spiritual Father: this is truly how we priests feel about the flock of people God has entrusted to our care: **that we love you in the Lord.**"* Pray we always do a good job, and ppl listen. It is not without its challenges- sometimes just the human reality in a funny way. I remember when I was first ordained and this sincere good lady at my first parish said to me, *Father, your message is great, but you are so young looking - the people, especially the young people will listen to you better when you get some grey hair. HA-HA- well it is happening!* And then another venerable lady, who was in her late 90's, but still with a sharp mind, said to me at my first pastorate - with a twinkle in her blue eyes, *Father I know I must listen to you because the Lord wants me to, but it is not easy - you are younger than my youngest grandchild!* Anyhow - young and old alike the priests deal with both joys and sorrows in our sacred ministry - just pray we are not like the Pharisees in the Gospel who say one thing and do the opposite - pray the Holy Spirit helps us to be **authentic** - since mysteriously the Lord touches his people through us priests. And please pray daily we get more vocations to the ordained priesthood here in our Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown. God bless you. ☩

Recommended Reading:

1. **The Priest in Union with Christ.** Fr. Reginald Garrigou- LaGrange O.P. TAN Books.
2. **The Priest is Not His Own.** Ap. Fulton J. Sheen. Ignatius Press.
3. **Many are Called: Rediscovering the Glory of the Priesthood.** Scott Hahn. Doubleday Books.