

Sunday December 18, 2016
EXPRESSIONS by Father Ed

Priesthood

December 18 is a very significant date to me for 46 years ago today I was ordained with over 50 of my classmates at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. Studying in Rome and ordination were the very best things that ever happened to me – life changing events that still continue to define me. The priesthood ensured that I developed characteristics of generosity, patience, and consistent goodwill, attributes I am sure I never would have acquired otherwise. For me, the priesthood is an opportunity to practice these qualities in a daily way.

Being a priest is a full-time test of love. It is not always easy but I don't have much choice. Everyone expects a priest to be nice. So, the priesthood has helped me become more altruistic and focused on the needs of others, distracting me from my own wants and worries. I can't honestly preach the Good News if I am critical and judgmental, so I have to be open-hearted to everyone and put aside my own impressions and points of view. A priest has to be a peace maker, someone who is able to bless variety and make a community despite differences of identities and ideas. This, of course, takes leadership but also compassion and generosity. A good priest inspires but also listens. The people he serves are his collaborators in ministry and can help him develop his gifts. Wise priests are gentle, learning from their own mistakes, and, therefore, sensitive to the imperfections of others.

The priesthood is not about status or personal benefits. Nor is it, I believe, primarily cultic or sacramental, though that is the traditional interpretation. It must reflect the Jesus himself and his ministry. The Gospels define the true nature of the priesthood. It is ministry to people, directly tending to their needs, especially those who are in need of physical and spiritual healing. Jesus was continually feeding people, consoling them, forgiving them, and teaching them. He saw the good in others and helped them use it to make new beginnings. He loved everyone and sacrificed himself, ultimately to the point of death, for the wellbeing of others. He considered himself like a shepherd. Wherever the sheep were, he also was, because they needed constant protection and guidance. Similarly, a priest's place is with his people, not just in the sanctuary of the church. I know that I was called to be a priest. It was what God intended me to be. I have been fortunate, more than I ever imagined.