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WHO IS YOUR FAVORITE PRIEST? THINK A WHILE! DID THE PRIEST THAT CAME TO MIND DIE? OR, IS HE HERE IN THIS CHURCH TODAY?

THIS PAST JUNE, POPE BENEDICT XVI DECLARED THIS YEAR TO BE THE YEAR FOR PRIESTS. THIS DOES NOT MEAN THAT THE PRIESTS ALIVE TODAY GET TO TAKE A YEAR-LONG VACATION! MAYBE THEY WOULD LIKE ONE, AND MAYBE THEY COULD USE ONE. BUT, WHAT THE HOLY FATHER SEES IS A NEED TO RENEW OUR AWARENESS OF THE PRIESTHOOD, OF WHAT IT IS AND WHY IT IS.

THE YEAR FOR THE PRIEST IS NOT A YEAR THAT SHOULD ONLY BE THE FOCUS OF THE ORDAINED PRIESTS OF TODAY. IT IS ALSO A YEAR THAT THOSE WHO ARE NOT PRIESTS, LIKE YOU AND ME, NEED TO BE KEENLY AWARE OF IN OUR PRAYER AND SPIRITUAL LIVES. WHILE WE ALL SHARE THE GIFT OF OUR PERSONAL PARTAKING IN THE PRIESTHOOD BY VIRTUE OF OUR BAPTISM WHEN WE WERE ANOINTED PRIEST, PROPHET AND KING, WE WOULD NOT HAVE THE FULLNESS OF THE SACRAMENTS WITHOUT ORDAINED PRIESTS IN THE CHURCH.

ONE OF THE THINGS WE ALL NEED TO BE AWARE OF IS THAT THE PRIESTHOOD IS EVIDENCE THAT GOD IS PRESENT AND ACTIVE IN THE WORLD.

EACH OF US WHO ARE NOT PRIESTS AND ARE MARRIED ADMINISTER THE SACRAMENT OF MATRIMONY TO OUR SPOUSES; EACH OF US CAN BAPTIZE, THE ORDAINED DEACONS AS NORMAL MINISTERS OF THAT SACRAMENT AND THE LAITY IN EXTRAORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES. BUT, ONLY THE PRIEST CAN, THROUGH THE POWER PASSED DOWN FROM THE APOSTLES, CONSECRATE THE BREAD AND WINE, TURNING THEM INTO THE BODY AND BLOOD OF JESUS CHRIST; ONLY THE PRIEST CAN, IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST GIVE ABSOLUTION FOR OUR SINS; ONLY THE PRIEST CAN SACRAMENTALLY ANOINT THOSE WHO SICK; AND ONLY THE BISHOP, WHO HAS THE FULLNESS OF HOLY ORDERS CAN ORDAIN PRIESTS AND DEACONS. THE BISHOP IS ALSO THE ONE WHO CAN ADMINISTER THE SACRAMENT OF CONFIRMATION, OR DELEGATE A PRIEST TO DO SO.

OUR READING FROM THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS TELLS US THAT PRIESTS ARE TAKEN FROM AMONG THOSE IN OUR MIDST AND MADE OUR REPRESENTATIVES BEFORE GOD TO OFFER GIFTS AND SACRIFICES FOR SINS. SINCE WE KNOW ONLY JESUS CHRIST WAS THE OFFERING FOR OUR SINS, THE PRIESTS AMONG US ARE REPRESENTATIVES OF JESUS CHRIST. WE ALSO KNOW, SINCE THESE PRIESTS OF TODAY ARE TAKEN FROM AMONG US, THEY ARE HUMAN IN EVERY WAY, JUST AS THE WRITER OF THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS

SAYS THEY ARE BESET BY WEAKNESS. SOMETIMES WE EXPECT THE PRIESTS OF TODAY TO BE PERFECT IN EVERY WAY. YET, WE KNOW THAT ONLY JESUS WAS PERFECT IN EVERY WAY. ONE OTHER KEY CONCEPT PRESENTED IN THIS SCRIPTURE READING IS THAT NO ONE TAKES THIS HONOR UPON HIMSELF, BUT ONLY WHEN CALLED BY GOD. GOD HAS CALLED EACH PRIEST FOR SOME REASON, SOMETIMES REASONS THEY OR WE DO NOT COMPREHEND, TO STAND IN THE PLACE OF JESUS CHRIST UNTIL HE COMES AGAIN.

EACH OF US WHO ARE NOT ORDAINED PRIESTS ARE ALSO CALLED TO OUR VOCATIONS IN LIFE BY GOD. SOMETIMES WE DO NOT UNDERSTAND WHY WE ARE CALLED TO SINGLE LIFE, PROFESSED RELIGIOUS LIFE OR SACRAMENTAL MARRIED LIFE. BUT, WE NEED TO REMEMBER THAT IT IS GOD WHO CALLS US...AND CALLS US FOR A REASON.

THOSE CALLED TO THE PRIESTHOOD, AND EACH OF US, ARE CALLED TO BE EVIDENCE THAT GOD IS PRESENT AND ACTIVE IN THE WORLD.

SO, WE MUST EACH BE READY, AND IN FACT, IN A HURRY, TO BE EVIDENCE OF GOD'S PRESENCE AT ALL TIMES. ST. MARK HAS JESUS IN A HURRY IN TODAY'S GOSPEL. HE HAS JESUS LEAVING JERICHO, YET THERE IS NO MENTION IN ST. MARKS'S GOSPEL OF JESUS DOING ANYTHING IN JERICHO. OTHER GOSPEL ACCOUNTS HAVE JESUS GOING TO OR LEAVING JERICHO, BUT MUCH DETAIL. THE ONLY GOSPEL PASSAGE RECOUNTING JESUS DOING SOMETHING IN JERICHO IS IN ST. LUKE'S GOSPEL WHEN JESUS EATS WITH ZACCHEUS, THE TAX COLLECTOR. WITH ONLY THIS ONE ACCOUNT, JESUS MUST HAVE HAD A QUICK STAY THERE, IN A HURRY TO THE NEXT PART OF HIS MINISTRY. HE HAS A HEAVY WORK LOAD TO COMPLETE BEFORE HE IS RAISED ON THE CROSS OF CALVARY, TO PERFORM HIS PRIESTLY DUTY TO OFFER A SACRIFICE TO GOD.

JESUS HAD ALREADY CURED ONE BLIND MAN AT BETHSAIDA. THAT HEALING WAS PERFORMED ALMOST IN SECRECY – JESUS HAD LED HIM OUTSIDE THE VILLAGE, PUT SPITTLE ON THIS EYES, THEN LAID HIS HANDS ON HIM, THEN ORDERED HIM NOT TO GO INTO THE VILLAGE. HERE, JESUS HAS LEFT JERICHO. THE BLIND MAN CALLS OUT, "JESUS, SON OF DAVID, HAVE PITY ON ME." THE CROWD TRIES TO SILENCE HIM. JESUS HAS HIM COME DIRECTLY TO HIM, AND IN FRONT OF THE CROWD, CURES HIM AND TELLS HIM TO GO ON HIS WAY, THAT HIS FAITH HAS SAVED HIM. THIS TIME, THE MAN NOT ONLY GOES AS JESUS INSTRUCTS HIM, BUT BECAUSE OF HIS CALL TO FAITH, HE IMMEDIATELY HIS FOLLOWS JESUS. JESUS' WAY HAS BECOME HIS WAY.

WHAT A CONTRAST TO THE SONS OF ZEBEDEE FROM LAST SUNDAY'S GOSPEL. JAMES AND JOHN, BLIND TO WHAT FAITH CALLS THEM TO DO, WANT PLACES OF HONOR FOR THEMSELVES. THIS BLIND MAN COMES TO FAITH AND WANTS TO BE A WITNESS ON BEHALF OF JESUS THAT OTHERS MAY SEE. WHAT WE SEE ARE VERY DIFFERENT PEOPLE, EACH OF WHOM HAS A CALL TO FOLLOW JESUS AND TO MINISTER TO OTHERS.

THE URGENCY OF JESUS AND THE URGENCY OF THE BLIND MAN GIVEN SIGHT IS THE SAME KIND OF URGENCY THAT JEREMIAH WRITING FOR THE DISPIRITED PEOPLE IN EXILE. HE TELLS THE PEOPLE TO SING ALONG, TO RAISE SHOUTS, TO PROCLAIM, TO GIVE PRAISE. ALL THIS IS PRELIMINARY TO JESUS COMING TO EARTH. ST. MARK WRITES KNOWING THE KINGDOM HAS ARRIVED AND HIS GOSPEL IS ALMOST WRITTEN AS IF IT HAD AN EXCLAMATION POINT AFTER EVERY SENTENCE. HE IS CONCISE. HE IS CLEAR. HE IS URGENTLY PROCLAIMING THE SACRIFICE OF THE GREAT HIGH PRIEST.

NO MATTER WHO YOU RECALLED EARLIER WHEN I ASKED WHO IS YOUR FAVORITE PRIEST, I HOPE YOU HAVE THE SAME ANSWER AS DID THE WRITER OF THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS AND AS DID ST. MARK. JESUS IS THE GREAT HIGH PRIEST. I ALSO ASKED IF THAT PRIEST HAD DIED OR IS HERE IN THIS CHURCH TODAY. JESUS IS BOTH, A PERSON WHO DIED, AND A PERSON WHO IS PRESENT IN THE EUCHARIST AND THROUGH THE ACTIONS OF HIS PRIEST OF TODAY.

THOSE WHO SERVE THE CHURCH THROUGH THE CALL OF GOD TODAY ARE ACTING NOT OUT OF THEIR OWN POWER, BUT IN THEIR PRIESTLY DUTIES, ARE ACTING "IN PERSONA CHRISTI", IN THE PERSON OF CHRIST.

AND WE ARE ALSO CALLED TO ACT IN THE NAME OF CHRIST, TO URGENTLY PROCLAIM THE KINGDOM, TO CELEBRATE THE PRIESTHOOD OF JESUS CHRIST AND TO CELEBRATE THOSE WHO HAVE ANSWERED GOD'S CALL TO SERVICE IN PERSONA CHRISTI.