

## **Radiance from the Ruins: Praying for Priests**

What had been alien to me—a black-coated mystery, heady and aloof, men in rectories, celibate yet suspect—became engaging and vital through actual priests who loved me well. Priests I know possess an attuned compassion that has deepened my trust in Jesus through His Church. No priest has enough time and resource, yet his faithful ‘yes’ to me has been the occasion more than once where I’ve seen the Father multiply his loaf and fish many times over.

The priest brings a feast—he offers up the sacrifice of Jesus at the altar; he makes the Mass a real meal, the center of Catholic worship. Maybe that’s why some of the devoted defer to him slavishly, and become nearly infantile before his ‘power.’ Rather than treating him as an icon of the divine, they make him an idol.

The idol has fallen. He lies before us in pieces, a divided human being, poured out and bleeding, possibly infectious. Of course not all priests abuse; the majority has not. No matter. We don’t discriminate. Hit nearly every day by another stinking wave of abuse allegations, we wonder what lurks beneath every cassock. The brave collared servant racing through the airport or post office provokes our grim reaction: ‘I wonder what he’s hiding...’ He is no fool; he sees your mistrust. Wise priests offer that up to Jesus as a prayer for real victims.

Every priest today shares in the suffering of little ones sacrificed on the altars of demonized colleagues—both living and dead. They know what they represent to us in our disillusionment. They pray more; they take the hit.

Pray for them. They laid their lives down for this Church that we visit weekly at best. They live there. Do they not experience our shared disappointment in her many times over?

As I consider the prayer needs of priests, I see clay oil lamps with simple globes of glass. Might we first pray for the source of that light—Jesus—to be alive and well in every priest? Might we pray for a special unction in this season for each priest to ‘go boldly to the throne of grace to receive mercy and find grace to help him in his time of need’ (Heb. 4: 16)? His need for Jesus has never been greater.

Then we can pray about the projections of others upon his ‘lamp.’ In my prayers, I see dirt hurled at him, unholy judgments we fling upon a human being who deserves our respect until he proves unworthy of it. We sin against God’s servant when we assume the worst about him; we darken his globe like mud splattering a house or street light. Pray for Jesus Healer to make known to his heart any way he has been darkened from without, by groundless accusation. Pray also for the fresh washing of his globe by undiluted mercy—cleansing of the blood and water so that he is able to make Jesus known to others in a clear, undistorted way.

Then we can pray for his heart, his source, where he can welcome the Source and stay true and

undivided in his moral life. These abuse scandals have revealed the vulnerabilities of priests to immorality—not just on the extreme end with children but with adults, with pornography, in their own fallen imaginations. Might we pray for a fresh humility—an inspired fire upon the sacrifice of his life, that might compel him to give account to wise friends and elders? No more Jesus alone—He invites us to share our divides with His members. Let us pray for priests to willingly discover new and challenging communities where they lead out in moral weakness, discover love as never before, and learn to refuse a host of counterfeits that breed in isolation.

Lastly, I ask that we pray for priests to discover a new impetus for sharing their humanity with us. Unspoken rules of ‘prudence’ have rendered most priests big on ‘teachiness’ and low on self-disclosure. Today we need the witness of how to live the truth-in-love; how do priests actually work out their integration as celibates? We all benefit from our leaders sharing a bit how they stay at once pure and open to Jesus’ members. Apart from well-worn prohibitions, what do we do with longings for love when there is no genital outlet? Pray for priests to wisely and candidly let us in a little to their process of sanctification.

As for the faithful who have fawned a bit too much over ‘father’ and who now are levelled by his cracked, clay foundation: pray for that priest. And repent of the childishness that made the jar an idol. He is just a man with a call that requires our prayers. We each have a priest in us that needs to arise on behalf of our beloved priests. I for one want to help them shine.

‘We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that the all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side...struck down but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus might also be revealed in our body’ (2 Cor. 4: 7-10).

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