

Holiness

The Fifth Promise of Ordination

In the fifth promise of ordination, the candidate is asked, “Do you resolve to be united more closely each day to Christ, the high priest, who offered Himself for us to the Father as a pure sacrifice, and with Him to consecrate yourself to God for the salvation of all?”

With this promise, the priest commits to a lifestyle that seeks after a perfect union with Jesus Christ. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Mt 5:48) St. Peter writes, “Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; for it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’” (1 Pet 1:15-16)

Seeking after perfection and holiness in Christ is foundational for the life of a priest.

This call to perfection can seem to be overwhelming for priests — and for all Christians, for that matter. The daily experience of our own human weakness, frailty, and sin might even make the goal seem so far out of reach as to be distressing. But we are united to Jesus Christ through faith, and as we grow ever closer to Him through prayer and the sacraments, then by His grace we are made holier and more perfect. We receive encouragement from the Letter to The Hebrews, “let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.” (Heb 12:1b-2a) The Universal Call to Holiness from the Second Vatican Council echoes this teaching, “The Lord Jesus, the divine Teacher and Model of all perfection, preached holiness of life to each and every one of His disciples of every condition. He Himself stands as the author and consumator of this holiness of life.” (*Lumen Gentium*, 40)

In the monastic tradition, there is a recognition that one will never be perfect like Jesus Christ, but every person needs a kind of north star, a point of direction for their lives that serves as a guide. Jesus Christ is the north star. He is the author and perfecter of our faith. And He serves as the model for the priesthood as He is the perfect high priest. And “it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, blameless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.” (Heb 7:26) As high priest, Jesus lived and continues to live for the sake of others. Likewise, every priest is called to model their life after Christ, seeking perfection and holiness and living in service of others.

The same can be said of husbands and wives who are seeking to build a domestic church in their home. They are called to seek lives of holiness, united with Jesus. And their very vocation as spouses and parents calls them to a certain sacrificial lifestyle for the good of the family. As such, they are called to consecrate themselves to Christ and to follow Him in lives of sacrifice. Husband and wife are called to selfless service of one another and of their children. This is foundational for their vocation as co-pastors of the domestic church.

This sacrifice is not just for temporal needs such as food, clothing, and shelter, but for the spiritual lives of the family. Parents should seek to nourish their families through their spiritual life in prayer, attending Mass regularly, and modeling the Christian life for the children. They should seek after lives of holiness and perfection for the sake of their children. Parents should suffer and sacrifice for their children. Like a priest, they should never become dejected for failing to attain perfection, but they should recognize that in seeking as much as they can every day to renew the effort to follow Jesus, He will make them perfect by His grace and fit for the life of heaven. The ministerial priest teaches this to his parishioners in particular by the way he lives his life as a model for them. The husband and wife, co-pastors of the domestic church, must model Jesus with their lives so that the children can respond positively to the love of Jesus Christ.

When parents seek after Christian perfection and live sacrificially, they create a community of love in their home. The result of this loving home is that the members of the family will then go into the world as a sign of God's love and draw others to Jesus. This is the logic of the Universal Call to Holiness: "Furthermore, married couples and Christian parents should follow their own proper path (to holiness) by faithful love. They should sustain one another in grace throughout the entire length of their lives. They should imbue their offspring, lovingly welcomed as God's gift, with Christian doctrine and the evangelical virtues. In this manner, they offer all men the example of unwearying and generous love." (LG, 41) May the grace of our Lord Jesus be with us all as we seek lives of holiness and sacrifice for the sake of our homes and the world. ■