

# THE HOLY PRIESTHOOD.

## A Great, Noble and Sublime Vocation.

### Awe-inspiring in its Dignity and Powers and Full of Responsibility in its Functions.

The following magnificent discourse was delivered in St. Alphonsus' Church, Grand Rapids, Mich., Sunday, October 29th, by Rev. Girardey, C.S.S.R.

Nothing is more necessary in the world than the Catholic priesthood. No one can sufficiently appreciate the past and present benefits conferred by it on mankind, not only in the spiritual order, but also in the temporal. By converting the pagan world to the Christian religion, the priesthood rescued the human race from the ruin and extinction into which paganism, by its gross ignorance and its shocking and degrading corruption, was fast plunging all mankind. The Christian religion with its priesthood did not appear a moment too soon on earth to save society by entering upon its divine mission of regeneration. Christianity's beneficial effects on the human race were due principally to the labors and influence of its priesthood. Such is the testimony of genuine history.

IT WAS THE CATHOLIC PRIESTHOOD, directed and guided by its head—the Pope—that converted, humanized and civilized our ancestors—these barbarous hordes which had overrun Europe, destroying every mere human institution and almost every vestige of civilization. It was the Catholic priesthood that first mitigated the frightful slavery that had obtained in paganism, and then took measures to have it abolished altogether. It was the Catholic priesthood, under the guidance of the Popes urging and arming Christendom for four and more centuries, that saved Europe from being turned into Mahomedan provinces, and thereby prevented the utter extinction of the sciences, the arts and civilization itself. It was the Catholic priesthood that taught the converted barbarians agriculture, the sciences, the arts, the art of governing. It is the Catholic priesthood that has produced, or at least inspired the greatest geniuses, the most profound thinkers, the most eloquent orators, and the most noble and heroic deeds of virtue, which this world has ever witnessed.

IT IS THE CATHOLIC PRIESTHOOD which still enlightens mankind by teaching the truths of divine revelation, which are the lights of the world, and which prevent a universal following of the most shocking and absurd aberrations of the human mind. The bulwark and the safeguard of society are to be found, not in so greatly vaunted modern material progress and shallow education, but in the Catholic priesthood—that most powerful and only successful opponent of immorality, anarchy and despotism—those fearful evils which are gradually undermining society and threatening its entire destruction. The Catholic priesthood is the savior of morality, for it constantly teaches, inculcates and upholds its true principles, combating vice in every shape and form and ever restraining the human passions from entirely corrupting and ruining society both individually and collectively. The Catholic priesthood is the parent of charity, and its institutions, which are the boast of our age and country. Charity, and even philanthropy, was unknown to the world until the Catholic priesthood had taught men that they are all brethren in Jesus Christ, and that what is done for His sake is the least of mortals, is done to Christ Himself. It was the Catholic priesthood that

FIRST REARED CHARITABLE INSTITUTIONS; and to this day it is the Catholic priesthood that everywhere, inspires, starts, spreads, fosters, directs and protects the most noble and the best regulated institutions for the relief of every ill to which human nature is heir.

Is not the Catholic priesthood the teacher and guide of mankind in the true religion? And what would have become of mankind without the true religion? What it was in the time of paganism, that is, devoid of morality, devoid of real virtue; and now, as then,

dishonesty, impurity, vice and universal corruption would soon reign supreme, and would eventually lead to anarchy and the gradual extinction of the human race. The true religion is, therefore, necessary as the only sure means of escaping these terrible misfortunes, and of securing temporal prosperity and realizing the benefits of genuine civilization. But it is chiefly through the efforts and influence of the priesthood that the true religion exercises its sway. From this we necessarily infer that the Catholic priesthood is indispensable to the world, and that it is the divinely appointed channel for the diffusion of every good gift among men.

In a higher and spiritual sense, the priest is God's agent, His minister-plenipotentiary, His representative, His treasurer, His vice-regent. The priest, being invested with the power of remitting sins and of offering the Most Holy Sacrifice of the New Law, acts the part of a mediator between God and man. Through the power he has of consecrating, that is, of changing bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus Christ, and thereby calling down the Son of God from heaven into his own hands on our altars, and offering the same as a Victim for our sins to the heavenly Father, he is, as the Fathers declare, the equal of the Blessed Virgin herself in dignity and her superior in power!

Moreover, through his power of forgiving sins, the priest, in some manner,

#### EQUALS GOD IN POWER.

Sin is of so great a malice, that no creature, however perfect or holy, is capable of atoning for it, and, nevertheless, the priest possesses the power of remitting it. "The power of forgiving sins," says St. John Chrysostom, "is greater than the power of raising the dead to life (and this is, indeed, a divine power); for by the latter a corruptible body is restored to a natural and perishable life, whilst by the former supernatural and everlasting life is restored to a dead soul."

The priest is God's mouth-piece; he speaks for God; his words are God's words; "God exhorting through us," says St. Paul (2 Cor. 5:20). The priest's words, then, must be accepted with the same docility as God's words. "He that heareth you," says Christ, "heareth Me, and he that despiseth you, despiseth Me." (Luke 10:16.) In the mouth of the priest the word of God possesses great efficacy, for it enlightens the mind, stirs up the conscience and moves the will. It converts sinners and confirms the just; it inspires men to the performance of heroic deeds and enables the priest to be a fisher of men for the Church of Christ.

The priest is the shepherd of God's flock. He must procure for it good pastures, feed it with spiritual food, watch over it, protect it against danger, govern it by wise regulations and administer to it suitable remedies in disease. He must devote to it all his time, all his talents and all its energy; he must constantly labor and even sacrifice himself for its welfare. By these means the priest continues and performs the work of Christ, possessing for this purpose the same powers as Christ Himself. The priest is, therefore, says St. Ambrose and Bernard, "a second Christ."

What a great, noble and sublime vocation is not that of the priest who represents and perpetuates the work of the Redeemer!

"On account of its great ends," says St. Alphonsus, "the priesthood is, of all vocations, the most exalted, the most sublime." Such a vocation, however, must come from God Himself. No one enjoys the right of entering so sublime a state solely through his own choice. In fact, it belongs to God alone to destine a man for any particular state of life. "I know, O Lord," said the prophet, "that the way of man is not his; neither is it in man to walk and direct his steps." (Jer. 10:23). "Every one," says St. Paul, "hath his proper gift from God; one after this manner, another after that." (Cor. 7:7).

If the vocation even to the ordinary states of life should come from God, the vocation to the priesthood, that is, the vocation to become God's own representative, necessarily has a divine origin. Even the Son of God did not of Himself assume the priestly dignity, but, as St. Paul expressly says, He was called to it by His Heavenly Father: "Neither doth any one take the honor to himself, but he that is called as Aaron was. So Christ also did not glorify Himself, that He might be a high priest, but

He that said unto Him: 'Thou art forever a priest according to the order of Melchisedech.'" (Hebr. 5:46.) Our divine Saviour Himself informed His apostles that those whose labor with Him for the salvation of souls, must be sent by His Heavenly Father. "The harvest," he said, "is great indeed, but the laborers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the vineyard, that He send laborers into His harvest." (Luke 10:2) Before choosing His twelve apostles from among His followers, Jesus spent the whole night in prayer to obtain light from His Heavenly Father, and ascertain which of His disciples were destined by Him to the sublime vocation of the apostleship.

After our Saviour's ascension into Heaven St. Peter ordered an election to be held to fill the vacancy occasioned in the ranks of the apostles by the treason and death of Judas. The voting resulted in a tie between Joseph Barsabaz and Mathias. To decide between the two the faithful had recourse to prayer: "Thou, O Lord," they said, "who knowest the hearts of all men, show which of these two men Thou hast chosen." (Acts 1:24.) We read in the Gospel that many offered themselves to Jesus Christ to become members of His priesthood, but He refused them, whilst of His own accord He called to this state others who had not manifested a desire or an inclination for such a vocation. "It came to pass," says St. Luke, "as they walked in the way, that a certain man said to Him: I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest. Jesus said to him: The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head. But He said to another: Follow me. And this one: Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. And Jesus said to him: Let the dead bury their dead, but go thou and preach the kingdom of God. And another said: I will follow Thee, Lord, but let me first take my leave of them that are at my house. Jesus said to him: No man putting his hand to the plough and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." (Luke 9:57-62.) To all of these examples.

#### OF THE DIVINE ORIGIN

of the vocation to the priesthood let us add the express words of our loving Redeemer: "You have not chosen Me." He says, "but I have chosen you and have appointed you, that you should go and bring forth fruit." (John 15:16).

The priesthood is a vocation so sublime in itself, so awe-inspiring in its dignity and powers, and so full of responsibility in its functions, that, in the early ages of the Church, men of tried and acknowledged virtue used every effort and ingenuity to escape it, deeming themselves wholly unworthy of so high a calling and unfit to exercise its exalted duties. "I find," says St. Cyprian, "all holy men in dread of the priesthood as of an enormous and insupportable burden." To try the obedience of one of his holiest monks, St. Basil commanded him to request in public to be raised to the priesthood. The monk's compliance with such an order was regarded by all who knew of it, as an act of heroic virtue, because, by making such a request, he publicly proclaimed himself as filled with the spirit of pride and an inordinate ambition in aspiring to the most exalted of dignities.

From all this we must naturally infer that it is sinful to enter the priesthood without a divine vocation. Such an act would be unwarranted usurpation of a divine dignity and office, and would result in extreme danger to salvation for him who would thus intrude, without the prerequisite fitness and helps, into a state of life, the sublimity and obligations of which would prove formidable to the very angels.

Another interference from the above is, that the young man, whom God calls to this exalted dignity, is bound to obey this call, and his parents are obliged not only to give their consent, but also to aid him by all the means in their power

#### TO FOLLOW THE DIVINE CALL,

however great the sacrifices this may entail on them. The reason is, that God has the first claim on their son, and that he has only lent or entrusted him to them, and that, wherever He demands their son of them, it is their sacred duty to comply with His holy will. And resistance on their part to the will of God, when it is clearly manifested to them through the decision of their son's confessor, will expose them to God's displeasure and even to justly

deserved fearful punishments. But true Catholic parents do not consider it a sacrifice for them to give up one or more of their sons, or even an only son, at the divine bidding, but they rather look upon it as a great honor and an inestimable favor, that God should deign to call their own son or sons to that sublime of all dignities—the priesthood.

He who is called to the priesthood is obliged not only to follow the divine call, but also to do all in his power to be faithful to it, and to become a worthy and holy priest. He ought not to grow faint-hearted at the thought of his weakness and imperfections, but he should do his best and trust in God, for says St. Thomas, "God, when choosing an individual for some special purpose, so prepares and disposes him, as to render him fit to execute the divine designs over him, according to the saying of the apostle: 'Our sufficiency is from God, who hath made us fit ministers of the New Testament.'" (2 Cor. 3:5-6).

Certain dispositions are requisite for entering the priesthood; of these some are physical, such as soundness of body, exemption from certain bodily defects or diseases, which render one unfit to discharge the sublime duties of this exalted state. Other dispositions are intellectual, or mental. A priest should not be an idiot or insane; nor should he be over-scrupulous or devoid of all talent. It behoves him to possess sound common sense and at least moderate talent, sufficient to acquire the necessary science or knowledge. Other dispositions regard the morals. The aspirant to the priesthood should be of a decent and honorable family; his own morals should be pure, and his conduct irreproachable and edifying.

In these days learning is more necessary than it was formerly. He who is devoid of talent, who is a dunce, or ignorant, would, as a priest, be a disgrace to the priesthood and the Church. Such a one would preach nonsense and even heresies in the pulpit, and would occasion the ruin of souls in the tribunal of penance. The candidate for the priesthood, even if he possess great talent, has to go through a long course of study—some ten or twelve years at least, before his ordination, so that, as a priest, he may render himself useful to every class of people, and, by his science and practical sense, uphold the honor of the Church and her priesthood, and save many souls.

If science is necessary for the priest, virtue is still more indispensable. "The priest," says St. Ignatius, "needs virtue far more than science."

THE PRIEST IS THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD; and is bound to preach more by his example than by his words. To train a young man in piety and learning, that he may become a worthy representative of Jesus Christ, takes many years and requires a great outlay. There is everywhere a scarcity of priests; there are thousands of Catholics who do not enjoy the ministrations of the priests of God. We who do should feel very thankful to God for the inestimable favor, and harken with docility to the voice of God's anointed. We should also "pray the Lord of the vineyard, that He send laborers in His harvest." Moreover, we should contribute according to our means to the seminary fund of the diocese, that the Bishop may be able to educate and prepare for the priesthood the young men who are now studying for the diocese. By doing so we shall share in all the labors these young Levites will, in our course of time, perform for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. Amen.

#### A Prominent Lawyer Says:

"I have eight children, every one in good health, not one of whom but has taken Scott's Emulsion, in which my wife has boundless confidence."

Probably Its Value—Joggers: I hear you got a nice round sum from Scribblers for your latest poem. Eummet: Yes, a nice round sum: something like this—O.

Traveller: Now, what ought little boys to say when a gentl'man gives them a penny for carrying his bag? Small boy: 'Tain't 'nough.

Captain: What is strategy in war? Give me an instance of it. Sergeant: Well, strategy is when you don't let the enemy discover that you are out of ammunition, but keep right on firing.