

Celebrate!

PRIESTHOOD SUNDAY

October 30, 2011

What is "Priesthood Sunday"?

Priesthood Sunday, Oct. 30, 2011, is a special day set aside to honor priesthood in the United States. It is a day to reflect upon and affirm the role of the priesthood in the life of the Church as a central one.

This nationwide event is coordinated and sponsored by the USA Council of Serra International.

What happens on Priesthood Sunday?

The lay faithful of all parishes in the USA develop their own special way of marking the day and honoring their parish priests both at Mass and other parish events, such as social celebrations and school activities.

Priesthood Sunday is designed to be an event led by the laity, but you can ask your parish priest to participate by talking about how he experienced and answered his own calling and about priests who have inspired him.

Priesthood Sunday offers an opportunity for priests and their parishioners to build a stronger working relationship. Together, they can dialogue to take an honest look at the challenges of the future and how they can collaborate to meet those challenges as a united force.

What is the USA Council of Serra International?

The USA Council of Serra International is an organization of lay men and women whose mission is to foster and affirm vocations to the ministerial priesthood and vowed religious life in the USA. More than 12,500 Serrans in over 300 clubs nationwide collaborate with their bishops, parishes and vocation directors to fulfill this mission. Through this ministry, Serrans work to further their common Catholic faith.

Visit the USA Council at www.serraus.org.

Turn the page for a complete Parish Planning Guide for Priesthood Sunday!

PARISH PLANNING GUIDE

PRIESTHOOD SUNDAY

October 30, 2011

STEP ONE: Plan a liturgy

October 30, 2011

Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings of the day:

READING 1: Malachi 1:24-2:2, 8-10

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: Psalm 131:1-3

READING 2: 1Thessalonians 2:7-9, 13

GOSPEL: Matthew 23:1-12

*For music and other liturgical ideas,
visit www.priestsunday.org*

Introduction at Mass

Parishioners and lay leaders may choose to celebrate Mass as a way to observe this special day. The parish liturgy committee may consider mentioning "Priesthood Sunday" in the introduction to the liturgy of the day. For example:

To be servants of God, we are called to be humble as Jesus himself was humble. On this, the Thirty-first Sunday of Ordinary Time, the Church in the United States observes "Priesthood Sunday." Through the lens of the paschal mystery – that is, Christ's own life, death, resurrection and subsequent Spirit-gift who unites us to God's very self – all of the baptized are called to mission. Faithful servants, whether lay or ordained, recognize that life is a journey. None of us is perfect, which is why we seek God's grace to mold our hearts into the image of Divine Love. We do not do this alone. We belong to a community called Church. This ordered community is served by parish priests who lead us ministerially and spiritually. Today in particular, we pray that the Holy Spirit will continue to inspire the mission of Christ and to strengthen the humble service of our priests.

Suggested Intercessions

The intercessions follow the Creed. After the intercessions, the blessing prayer is proclaimed by the liturgical assembly as a whole or by the chair of the pastoral council.

Having heard proclaimed the saving works of God among us, let us now bring before the God of joy and promise our needs.

For God's holy Church:

May our pope, bishops and priests continue to minister in humble justice and faithful service. Let us pray to the Lord.

For nations and their governments:

May they hear the call to work toward peace, justice and equity between one another and for the people they serve. Let us pray to the Lord.

For all who have suffered abuse:

May those who have suffered abuse find strength, hope and peace. Let us pray to the Lord.

For an increase in religious vocations:

May men and women respond to the Christ's call to serve the church in the priesthood, diaconate or religious life. Let us pray to the Lord.

For all who suffer from sickness, hunger or loneliness:

May they find in our communities faithful support and generous kindness. Let us pray to the Lord.

For those struggling with doubt, anxiety or fear:

May the peace of Christ embrace them and lead them to his comforting light.

Let us pray to the Lord.

For all of us gathered in this holy place:

May God continue to respond to Christ's call to help to poor and the afflicted. Let us pray to the Lord.

Good and gracious God, hear the prayer of your people. In your merciful love, inspire our priests to faith-filled service. Answer the prayers of all who believe in you. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

If the blessing prayer is used, the above prayer is omitted and the following blessing is used. The assembly may be invited to extend both hands over the priest.*

Blessing Prayer

In your loving kindness, O good and gracious God, you sent your Son to be our shepherd and guide. Father _____ continues Christ's ministry of working in the vineyard by sustaining and guiding your holy people. Bless Father _____. Let your Spirit uphold him always in his service to the people of this parish. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

The above blessing is adapted from "Blessing of Those Who Exercise Pastoral Service" from the Book of Blessing (Washington, D.C.: ICEL, 1987), p. 689.

Blessing of the Parish Priest(s)

A member of the parish council or other parish leadership organization, or a deacon, may invite the members of the assembly to join in a blessing over the parish priest(s). This blessing may take place after the prayer after communion. This blessing is an alternate to the blessing following the General Intercessions.

The ministries of the Church are many and varied, but God shows God's goodness by sending priests to care for the people of God. Today we ask God to bless Father _____, who faithfully builds up the body of Christ.

Reflection

The readings for the Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time are quite rich interpreted through the lens of service. Matthew's Gospel warns against being seduced by the glory of those things that prevent authentic discipleship: titles, places of honor, not helping people in their need, and so forth. Christ challenges us all in our understanding of discipleship – that is, what it means to be a Catholic Christian – when he states: "The greatest among you must be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; but whoever

humbles himself will be exalted" (Matt 23:12). Thus discipleship is about humility or being humble. Humble or humility comes from the Latin word for dirt or dust. Take the image of a worm. A worm is close to the ground, and thus is covered in dirt and breathes dust. To be humble is to recognize that life is messy, especially the spiritual life. As we know, life is a journey of being open to God's working in and through us by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit offers us the possibility to grow in the image and likeness of Christ. The first reading recalls that we are in covenant with God. God established to covenant with God's own people. As disciples, we renew that covenant every Sunday in the celebration of Eucharist. We remain in relationship to "the one God who created us" (the first reading). By following the covenant we do as God intends for us. We serve God and one another. God is working through God's servants so that God's will will continue to be manifest in our lives. Or, as the Gospel reminds us, we are to practice what is preached.

Within the Church we have ordained priests who help us discern Christ's call to us in our lives. Many of our priests give much of themselves in order to help all of us stay true to paths of deep faith and love in God and neighbor. Without many of them, many of us would become lost and we would not always practice what we believe. Many of these fine priests truly live what the Gospel calls all of us to live, to be humble disciples serving those in need – whether those needs are spiritual or economical. Through their lives and deep faith they witness to the God's overflowing love and generosity.

Whether we are ordained or lay, for our hearts to grow in the love of God, we must humble ourselves in order to see the way God intends. The journey of faith is a road of accepting God's gracious goodness into our hearts in order that we may share the faith, hope and love of God to one another. Of course, we do that in Christ's command to be humble and grow in humility.

Concluding Prayer

You are the giver of every good gift, O God of abundant goodness and mercy. Hear the prayer of your people, and bring us into closer union with your Son, Jesus Christ our Promise of Hope, in whose name we offer this prayer. He is Lord forever and ever.

One afternoon, I was waiting for Mass to start at St. John's and there was no priest. Some nuns were visiting from New York and they said they didn't have a priest in all their parishes anymore, and that Eucharistic services were common.

I thought, "What would it be like if there were no priests?" And I asked myself, "What are you doing about it?"

Elizabeth Shrier, Serra Club of Omaha, NE

STEP TWO: Set up a dialogue

How well do your parishioners and priests know each other? Start a dialogue to exchange concerns and ideas.

Use Priesthood Sunday as a starting point for opening parish communications. Set up an informal parish meeting with your priests. The purpose of this meeting is to give parishioners a chance to listen to priests talk about their everyday lives and need for support, and for the priests to hear the laity's concerns, needs and ideas for mutual support with priests. This meeting requires a little planning:

- Consult with your priest(s) to set a date for the meeting.
- Draw up a meeting agenda.
- Select a volunteer parishioner to record the highlights of the meeting's discussion.
- Decide on a start and end time for the meeting.
- If you need a second meeting, repeat the steps above.

STEP THREE: Celebrate!

There are many ways to celebrate Priesthood Sunday with the whole parish. Here are some ideas:

- Parish pot luck dinner to celebrate "Father's Day"
- Coffee cake reception following Masses
- School essay, poster or poetry contest
- Banner in front of church
- Send press releases and photos to local press
- Photo on cover of parish bulletin along with biography
- Check the www.priestsunday.org "Share Ideas" section to find out what other parishes and institutions are doing to celebrate the event

Celebration planning:

- Form a celebration committee
- Select dates for the committee to meet
- What parish groups would like to participate?
- Select a date for the celebration

Prayer of Affirmation and Strengthening in Holiness for Priests

*This composition is an arrangement of phrases from ancient ordination liturgies (cf. Bradshaw, *Ordination Rites of the Ancient Churches of the East and West*) that emphasize the call to holiness. Ordinations always began with a Rite of Election. The proclamation which begins this prayer was at the end of that rite and invited the people to affirm the calling by prayer that the person would be strengthened in holiness to conform to their calling, recognizing that both calling and holiness come from God.*

Divine Grace, which always heals that which is infirm and supplies that which is lacking has called our beloved brothers to sacred ministry. Let us pray that they be confirmed and strengthened with the grace of the Holy Spirit. Fill them with grace and counsel, that they may love you with all their hearts, all their minds, and all their strength. Grant them irreproachable conduct, steadfast faith, and good works so that they may help and guide your people with unselfish motivation. Grant them wisdom, let their minds be sober and watchful, so that they may be filled with works of healing and words of instruction. May they teach your people in meekness and serve you in holiness with a undivided mind and a willing soul. May they be the light of your only begotten Son that the word of your gospel may be spread and your name may be glorified in every creature. May they serve at your holy altar with pure hearts and good consciences. Grant that they may prosper in all your commandments and the keeping of your laws, so that they may be able to minister joyfully on the day of your coming.

Find more materials at www.priestsunday.org