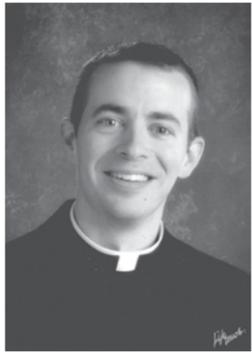


Fasting for Priestly Vocations

God's priestly call for Father Wesley ... Westley ... Weasley



By Father Wesley Schawe
Director, Office of Priestly Vocations

As I was sorting through some of my belongings (trying to simplify my life!), I came across a stack of letters and cards I received from children while I was a seminarian. Getting my first name correct—not to mention my last—was a challenge. But what a beautiful gift! Their questions and comments made me smile then, and they still make me smile now. Some examples:

- I like to play tag. What do you like to do?
- My brother, sister, and I

were a smore for Halloween.

• We were supposed to ask you about seminary school. I couldn't think of anything to write, so I thought I'd talk to you like my best friend. Hi, Bye.

- How many years do you want to be a priest?
- My grandma was talking about someone practicing to become a priest and immediately I thought of you!
- P.S. I will keep you in my prayers.

On occasion I got a window into a child's difficult life, like in 2002 from a dear kid in Great Bend:

"I hope you be a good Priest at what Church you go to. And I hope you git good grades. I have one brother and one sister and my dad girl friend is pragnet so I do not know if I am having a girl of boy. How many brother and sister do you have. My dad and mom are deforst are your mom and dad deforst?"

In all of the goofiness or sadness, I saw children who reached out to a priest (or almost-a-priest). Even today,

I thank the Lord for the gift of my priesthood. The Lord chose me to be a biological father to none and a spiritual father to thousands. The Lord chose me to follow the example of Jesus (see Ephesians 5:32), taking not one woman, but the entire Church as my bride.

After the resurrection, Jesus spent a short time with His disciples (which we celebrate in this Easter season) before returning to His Father at the Ascension. Yet even upon his return, He never really left His people:

"Behold, I am with you always until the end of the age." *Matthew 28:20*

One of the remarkable ways that Jesus remains with us "always" is through His priests. When a priest acts "in persona Christi" (in the person of Christ), it is truly Christ who is speaking, acting, ministering! I hope that this Lent you joined Bishop Brungardt in fasting for priestly vocations for the Diocese of Dodge City. Perhaps you are called to continue into the Easter season. Our need is dire. Yet God's promise is unconditional—He will always be with us! Our Lord already knows who He has chosen to serve as priests in southwest Kansas—maybe some of the very ones who wrote me a letter years ago. May your fasting bear fruit in the generous "yes" of those called.

GOD OUR FATHER, YOU MADE EACH OF US TO USE OUR GIFTS IN THE BODY OF CHRIST. WE ASK THAT YOU INSPIRE YOUNG PEOPLE WHOM YOU CALL TO THE PRIESTHOOD AND CONSECRATED LIFE TO COURAGEOUSLY FOLLOW YOUR WILL. WE ASK THIS THROUGH CHRIST, OUR SAVIOR. AMEN.

A grace ovation

As a gift to my brother on the occasion of his ordination years ago, I told him that I would offer up all of my speaking engagements in thanksgiving for his vocation to the priesthood. This seemed an especially fitting and easy gift because I love speaking for groups, and talking about our faith always brings me great joy.



By ELIZABETH KELLY
Your Heart, His Home

At times, of course, my joy in this is strained.

One evening stands out as an example. I was scheduled to speak for an evening event, and I did not go on until 8:15 pm. I was tired, it was winter, dark, cold, windy, and one of those dreadful mixes of snow and sleet. I sat at my desk grumbling that I should be so put out as I printed out the text of my speech – the topic was, no less, praying through suffering. So, after a full day's work, I bundled my body and braced myself for winter's assault on the way to my car, grumbling all the way.

But as I was driving to the gig, clutching the steering wheel, slumped over with brow furrowed, the Lord reminded me very clearly of my promise – to offer up in thanksgiving my speaking engagements on behalf of my brother, for the protection and flourishing of his priesthood. I immediately saw him the day of his ordination: he glowed like a perfect, brilliant sunrise. Another image flashed in my mind: little children running up to him after Mass, their earnest little arms extended to him with complete trust and affection. I thought of so many people who have been blessed to call my brother, Father, including me.

I immediately adjusted my attitude and went laughing into my talk, sensing God's free rush of grace to give me stamina and sincere affection for the needs of my audience. The talk came off well and at the end, I was given a standing ovation. I wish I could claim that I am frequently the recipient of standing o's, but I have to confess this was rather unusual. I laughed all the way home, even as I crept over the icy streets, making my way through the bitter winter's darkness.

I take two things from this little episode.

One, the Heavenly Father must be so very pleased with my brother's priesthood. (I realize that I am probably a smidge biased on this point, but I still think my assessment is judicious.)

Two, and more importantly, I am reminded that God's grace can never be exhausted. He never tires of extending himself to me. Never. He only asks the tiniest effort on my part, the slightest leaning in his direction, the most miniscule effort to resist evil. He will rush in and joyfully do the rest. He will take my measly offering and magnify it unto his glory. The generosity of this reality fills me with awe.

Your grumbings may be big or small, exaggerated or very real indeed. You may be in the throes of resisting great or petty evil, but the principle holds true: you need only offer what you can Jesus will do the rest, and the communion of angels and saints will offer a veiled but glorious ovation in thanksgiving and in joy.

Father, never let me forget that your inexhaustible grace sustains me in every moment and that it is your joy to ever offer it. Thank you for my brother and the gift of his priesthood. Bless you, my brother – and Father.

Elizabeth Kelly is an award-winning speaker and the author of six books, including including Jesus Approaches: What Contemporary Women Can Learn about Healing, Freedom and Joy from the Women of the New Testament. She is trained as a spiritual director in the Ignatian exercises and leads retreats with a particular focus on helping women to flourish in their faith. She teaches in Catholic Studies at the University of St. Thomas (MN). Her website is: www.emkbooks.com.

