

## TO SAVE A THOUSAND SOULS

As the New Year begins we return to the review of chapter five of the book To Save a Thousand Souls; by Fr. Brett A. Brannen, which focuses on twenty signs and characteristics of a priestly vocation. As you read this review today, consider how some of these points direct our thoughts to what characteristics men called to priestly life should have, but especially during this month where we are reminded to reflect on how all of humanity is called to treat each other, to recognize each person's dignity, and the commitment it takes for each of us as children of God to live well in this world but to live well with everyone else also.

We begin with point thirteen; "A good candidate for diocesan priesthood has a "priest's heart". What does this mean? Fr. Brannen explains in the chapter that a priest's heart is modeled after the Sacred Heart of Jesus. This means that within the very core of the person, those characteristics that may come out in one's personality, in the way they treat others, in the virtue that is continuing to grow in the person, one sees something of Christ. To be more specific, think of Christ Himself, and the traits or virtues that each of us know we should strive to imitate as one of His disciples. A soul goes to Christ because of His compassion, gentleness, kindness, understanding, patience, openness to serving all people. Christ always put others ahead of Himself. He loved to teach people about His Father and our Father! A man who has these traits and also loves the Faith, loves the Church, and either has or shows a desire to bring others to Christ, probably is showing the sign of a possible priestly vocation. Say something to that man and pray for him.

The fourteenth sign of a priestly vocation is listed as having self-mastery or self-discipline. This is most important with regard to how a man speaks with others, especially when under stress or in difficult situations. He must always be making Christ present to others no matter how he may be humanly feeling inside. Fr. Brannen refers back to the words of a retreat master who once said "the three most important qualities in the life of a priest are: Be kind. Be Kind. Be kind." In other words, a man should be able to show self control in three very important areas; his thoughts, words and actions. Another important point made in this section is that part of being in self-control, or having self-mastery as a quality is a sign of one's dependability. This self-mastery, self-discipline and dependability can also be formed in people but it is very

important that there be signs of it already having begun to take root when considering if a man might be called to a priestly life.

You may notice that each of these signs/characteristics tend to build on each other as the next one obviously does from the prior two. The sixteenth sign one should consider is does a man show stability in lifestyle. Why is stability important? Stability is a sign of the level of ones commitment. I often think of my parents and the many married couples in life who have lived the commitment they made to each other and to God on the day of their wedding as an example and an inspiration. A man called to diocesan priesthood has to be stable enough in life to be able to commit fully to what God, the Church, his Bishop, and the people he is assigned to serve and make Christ present to; expect of him. Christ often used the analogy of a shepherd, a shepherd is successful because of his stability. When one reflects on the qualities of a great shepherd, he is one who day in and day out remains always with his flock, guiding and caring for them both in good and bad weather, in the heat and the cold. A great shepherd is so often present to his sheep that they truly can distinguish his voice, or his whistle from that of any other.

The final point for this month is of great importance in the life of a man possibly called to priesthood. A good candidate for diocesan priesthood should be a *Christian Gentlemen*. This is of great importance because it is so lacking in today's society and it also underlines the very basis of Christ's own example to us all and his command of how we should treat one-another. Fr. Brannen refers to the phrase "Public Propriety" as a term which means that one understands what is a fitting and proper way to act when out in society. That of course is a sign of great maturity. If a man is called to make Christ present to others through the priesthood, then living as a Christian Gentlemen already should be evident in his lifestyle.

I hope you all have enjoyed a blessed Christmas season and that the New Year is full of many blessings for you and your family. Pax Christi!