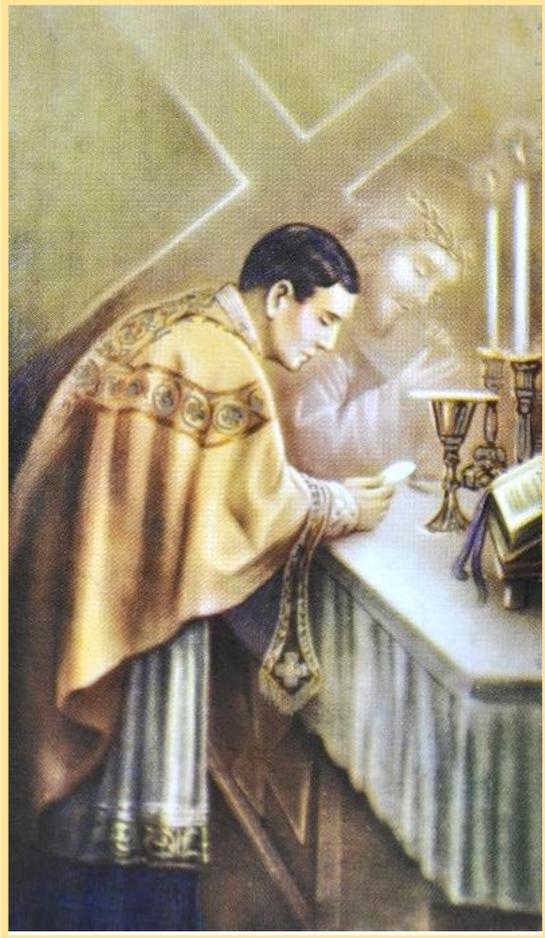


*Memoirs from
the Heart of a Priest*

by Father John Rizzo

A Prayer for Priests

by St Charles Borromeo



O Holy Mother of God,
pray for the priests your
Son has chosen to serve
the Church.

Help them, by your
intercession, to be holy,
zealous, and chaste.

Make them models of
virtue in the service of
God's people.

Help them to be pious in
meditation, efficacious
in preaching, and zealous
in the daily offering of
the Holy Sacrifice of the
Mass.

Help them administer the Sacraments with love and joy.

Amen.

PREFACE

I love being a priest. In all my years of priesthood, I have never desired to be anything other than a priest. It is an immense honour and joy to be able to bring God to others, and I cannot thank God enough for my vocation.

I would like to share with you some memoirs from the last 36 years of my priesthood. These memoirs come from my heart, with a great admiration for my holy priesthood.

I hope that these memoirs will give you a greater appreciation of the Sacraments of Holy Mother Church. Jesus Christ instituted the Sacraments as a means of giving us grace, and so uniting us more closely with Him. This is His desire, and it should be ours too. Let us never forget the answer to the question: "Why did God make us?" God made us to know Him, love Him, and serve Him in this world and to be happy with him forever in the next. And we priests are here to help you attain that goal – primarily through the Sacraments.

Please pray for me, as I do for all who read this little booklet. May God bless you.



Fr John Rizzo

Chaplain of Tyburn Priory

Diocese of Parramatta, NSW, Australia

June 11th, 2021

Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus

For further copies of this booklet, please email
priestmemoirs@gmail.com

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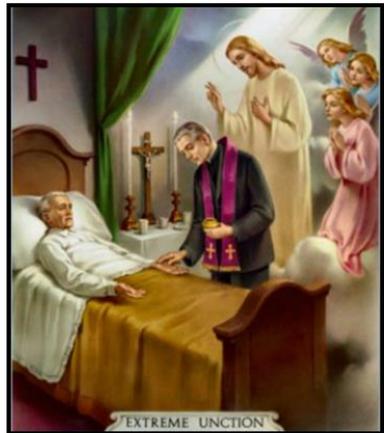
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MY CALLING TO THE PRIESTHOOD

It was December 31st, 1966. I was 6 years old, and my grandfather Luigi lay dying downstairs in his bedroom in the basement of my mother and father's home near Boston. My mother phoned the parish priest, Fr Tom Donnelly, and asked him to give the Last Rites to my grandfather.

When Fr Tom came, I quickly ran down the stairs to my grandfather's bedroom. Father was carrying the Holy Eucharist, so my mother held a lit candle and rang a little bell as she escorted Father downstairs. I was a little bit anxious, and I asked Fr Tom "May I watch what you are doing?" He said to me "Yes, John, as long as you are quiet." That was going to require a miracle!

I left the room so that my grandfather could make his final confession. Fr Tom motioned me in afterwards, and I watched him anoint my grandfather. It made such an impression on me, and I thought to myself "Wow! Maybe one day I can do this." This thought stayed with me as I grew up, and I entered the seminary at the age of 18.



In fact, every time I give the Last Rites (also called the Anointing of the Sick and, in former days, Extreme Unction) to a dying person, there are still flashes in my

mind of my grandfather being anointed. It is beautiful, because it reminds me of the time Almighty God first called me to be a priest, and I am sure that this is one of the reasons why I especially love to be by the bedside of the dying. It is one of my greatest joys to administer the Last Rites and prepare souls to meet God.

I remember giving the Last Rites to an elderly woman in Minnesota whose little grandson was present. He said to me afterwards "Father, why were you smiling when you were anointing my grandmother?" I said to him "I must admit that I didn't know I was smiling, but I most certainly have a joy knowing that your grandmother will die a very holy death."

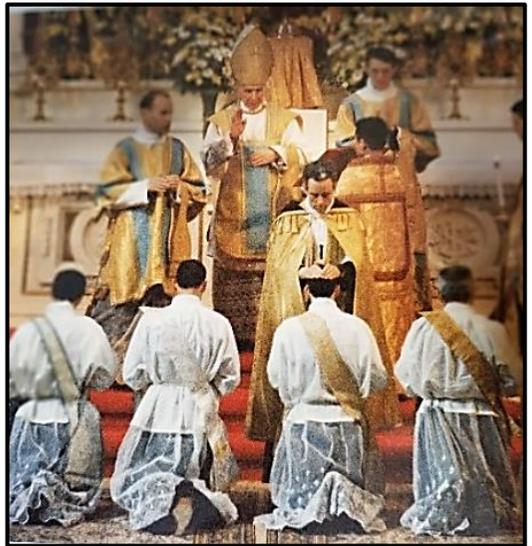
I grew up in an Italian Catholic family where the Rosary was a familiar prayer. My three brothers and I all slept in one bedroom – bunk beds save an awful lot of space! My mother would come in at night and tell us a story of a boy saint. Then she would go to the bedroom where my three sisters were, and she would tell them a story of a girl saint. I have very fond memories of growing up in such a beautiful Catholic environment, with my mother and father instilling in us the Catholic faith – a faith which led to one of their sons becoming a priest, the unworthy vessel that I truly am.

My heartfelt gratitude to my dear mother and father, and to Almighty God for giving me this gift of the priesthood. Amen.



Me on the left with my twin brother Joseph, aged 8

The laying on of hands on my day of Ordination to the Priesthood, May 19, 1985



A priest forever



**My parents
receiving my first
blessings on the day
of my Ordination**





**My twin brother, Joe, as
thurifer at my First Solemn
High Mass.
Pentecost Sunday 1985**

**Offering
Holy Mass at
Tyburn Priory**



**With the
community of
Tyburn Priory
(Contemplative
Benedictines)**

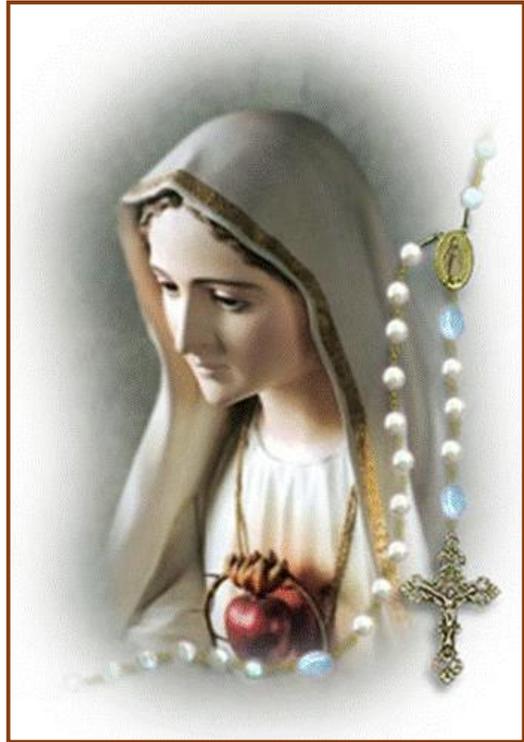
WRONG FLOOR – OR SO I THOUGHT!

I was ordained on May 19, 1985. Before I could accept my first assignment, I had to complete some studies at the seminary. One night – about a week after I was ordained – the rector of the seminary knocked on my door and said to me "Father, I want you to go to St Vincent's Medical Centre in Bridgeport (in Connecticut). Annie, a benefactress of ours is there, and she is seriously ill. I would like you to give her Holy Communion and the Last Rites." I immediately left my desk, borrowed a seminary vehicle, and drove for an hour and a half to the medical centre.

When I got to reception, I asked what room Annie was in. "Room 312", I was told. I got into the lift as quickly as I could, and pushed the button for the third floor. When the doors of the lift opened, I ran out and went quickly into what I thought was room 312. As I ran in, my stomping feet woke up the man who was lying in the bed. I turned around to look at the room number – *Oh no, wrong room!*

I nervously said to him "Oh, I am so sorry – I am looking for room 312 – and I see that this is room 212. I have to go up another floor." He said to me "No worries, Father." When I heard him call me 'Father', I said to him "Are you a Catholic?" He said "Yes Father, but I haven't been to Church for many years." I jokingly replied to him "You know, RC means Roman Catholic, not Retired Catholic!"

He chuckled a bit and we got talking. He said "You know, Father, I have not been to Church, but I have said many Rosaries to Our Lady." I was in no doubt about who had led me to this man's room – *thank you, Mother Mary*. I said to him "Why don't you make your peace with God – would you like me to hear your confession?" He said "Oh Father, how can I do that? It has been so long." I said "I can help you with your confession, if you like."



Whenever anyone has not been to confession for a long time, and is unsure what or how to confess, I go through the Ten Commandments with them. He agreed to that. He made a beautiful and necessary confession, after which I gave him half of the Communion Host I had with me for Annie. I then gave him the Anointing of the Sick, and what is called the *Apostolic Pardon*, an indulgence for the remission of temporal punishment due to sin.

I asked him "What are the doctors saying about you?" He said "The doctors say that I am doing fine, and that I will be home by the end of the week." It was a Wednesday evening that I was speaking to him. He was anticipating going home on the Friday. I said goodbye to him and hurriedly went upstairs to see Annie. After giving Annie the Sacraments, I left the hospital and drove back to the seminary.

The following day – Thursday – I was busy taking exams. In the evening, I decided to call the hospital and find out how Annie was. The nurse told me that she was doing fine. I then asked her "There is a gentleman in room 212 – I don't know his name – how is he doing?" The nurse said "Hold on, Father, I will just find out." About 30 seconds later, she got back on the phone and said "I am sorry to say, Father,



but he died this morning." I was shocked – he certainly didn't look like he was going to die.

But you know what? That man was right. He said that he would be home by the end of the week – and he was, holding onto the hand of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Mary, Refuge of Sinners,
pray for us.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

1. I, the Lord, am your God. You shall not have other gods besides me.



2. You shall not take the name of the Lord, your God, in vain.

3. Remember to keep holy the sabbath day.

4. Honour your father and your mother.

5. You shall not kill.

6. You shall not commit adultery.

7. You shall not steal.

8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

9. You shall not covet your neighbour's wife.

10. You shall not covet your neighbour's goods.



ANGELS AT THE ALTAR

It is a teaching of our Catholic faith that angels exist - that is, spiritual beings who are servants and messengers of God. We normally only see these spiritual beings with the eyes of faith.

It was June 1985, and I had been ordained for about a month. I was chaplain for a summer camp for families in the state of New Hampshire. One day after Mass, a young lad came over to me and said "Father, please don't think I'm crazy, but I saw two angels, one on each side of you, whilst you were offering Mass." I was quite taken aback at hearing this. I comforted him and said "I believe you. I am sure that you saw those angels, because we know that angels surround the altar whenever the Sacrifice of the Mass is being offered." But he insisted: "Father, I mean it, I saw two angels – they were beautiful angels – one on each side of you." I reassured him and said "I *do* believe you. Thank you for letting me know, because it really increases my faith." How happy he was to have had the extraordinary privilege of seeing those angels.

About an hour later, an elderly lady came over to me, and said "Father, may I have a word with you?" I said "Yes." She said "Father, I saw two angels right next to you whilst you were offering Mass." Again, I was taken aback! Just

one hour between two different people giving their eyewitness account of angels at the altar during Holy Mass.

I asked the woman "Do you know this young boy, who is a member of the camp?" "No, Father. I am just a neighbour – I live across the street. I am not part of this camp, but I had to tell you this. I saw two angels – one on your right, and one on your left, whilst you were offering Mass." I asked for a more vivid description, and she just called them "beautiful creatures with wings."

I went back to the boy, and I asked him for a description of the angels. I asked if they had wings, and he said "Oh yes, Father, you could see the wings." "How beautiful were they?", I asked. "Father, they were AWESOME", he replied.



What those two witnesses told me that day has stayed with me all these years. I am very grateful to them for having told me, because it has helped me to have a vivid sense of the presence of angels whenever I offer the Sacrifice of the Mass.

Of course, the altar is surrounded not by just two angels – but thousands! Why is this? Because every time we attend Mass, we participate in the Liturgy of Heaven. How blessed we are to be in the company of these angels!

"I DECIDED TO LIVE"

It was August 1985. I had been ordained a priest only a few months before, and my first assignment was London, England. One Tuesday morning, an elderly gentleman was preparing everything for the Mass I was about to offer. Unbeknown to me, he had thrown a match into the rubbish bin in the sacristy. Because he was partially blind, he did not realise that he had not fully extinguished the match. I started to say Mass, when suddenly the smoke detectors went off because of a fire in the sacristy. We had to quickly evacuate the chapel oratory and the presbytery, but I first needed to remove the Blessed Sacrament from the tabernacle. There was much smoke, and I inhaled a lot of it.

Later that evening, I was scheduled to offer another Mass, in North London. The train ride there was about 45 minutes long – from Wimbledon Park to North London. Because



of the smoke inhalation, I was not feeling very well. I thought to myself "Maybe I could cancel that evening Mass and have an early night." But I had second thoughts and decided to go. I got on the train with a piercing headache, arrived at the Church not feeling well, and began to say

Mass. I felt so unwell that I was wondering if I was going to be able to finish the Mass. Halfway through the Mass, at the time of the Offertory, I heard the large wooden doors at the back of the Church squeak open, announcing the arrival of a latecomer. I finished the Mass and went into the sacristy. How I longed for a Panadol!

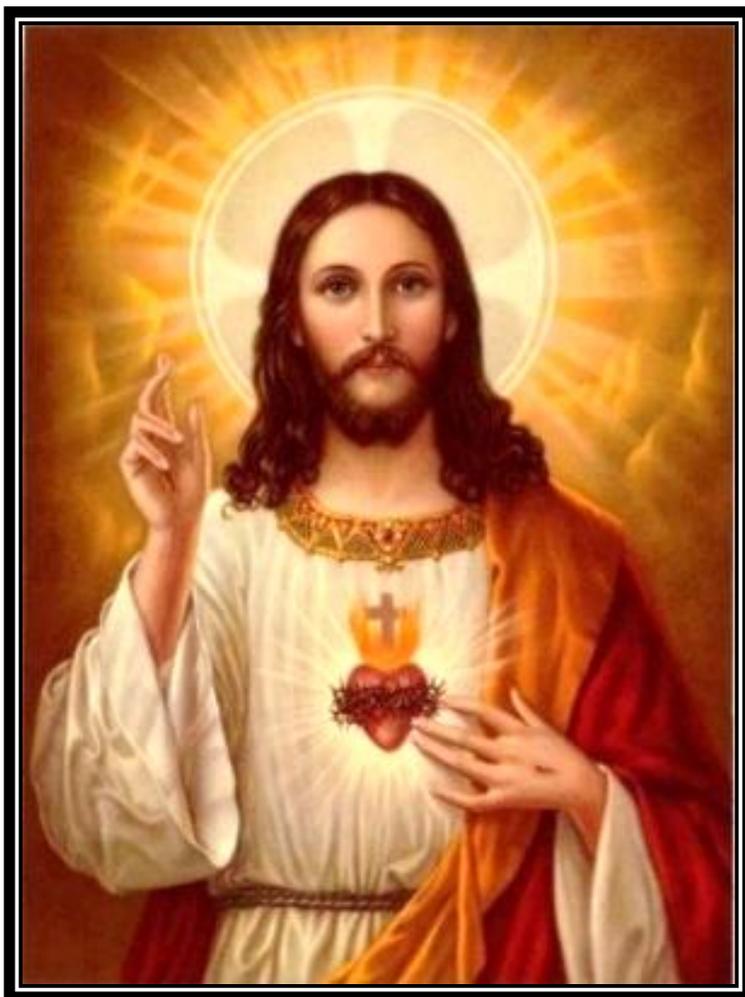
As I was divesting, a man who appeared to be in his late sixties entered the sacristy. As he approached me, I saw that he had a gun in his hand. I suddenly felt very uneasy, to say the least! He placed the gun on the bench where the vestments were. He said to me "Father, I was going to end my life tonight. I was on my way to the park, to sit on the bench and shoot myself in the head. But Father – I noticed the lights on in the Church, and I came in to seek shelter. There you were saying Mass, and I knelt at the back. The Mass was so beautiful that I decided to live."

I was amazed! This was the latecomer I had heard come in. We spoke at length about all his hardships, and then he made a beautiful, humble confession. After he left, I took the gun and handed it over to the police.

I thought to myself, as I was sitting on the train to return home, "What if I had the early night I wanted, and did not go to say that evening Mass? That man would have walked past a closed Church, a Church in the dark, which couldn't have provided the shelter he was seeking. Oh my God,

thank you for this opportunity of being an instrument of grace. This man needed grace – he saw the lights on in the Church, and entered. He saw the light emanating from Your Sacred Heart, and he decided to live. Amen."

I kept in contact with this man, and he lived a very godly life until his death. May he rest in peace.



CONVERSION ON A HAYSTACK!



In 1988 when I was living in Idaho, I would often go on long trips to the neighbouring state of Montana to offer Mass in the different missions. One day a family asked me to see their elderly father who lived in a very remote but beautiful area just outside of Whitefish, Montana.

This man had been away from the Church for a long time, and the family simply wanted me to speak to him. After offering a mid-afternoon Mass in one of the missions in Montana, I drove another hour and found myself at a very remote farm. I got out of my car and knocked on the door, but looking through the glass door, I could see that no one was inside. It was a warm winter's day, there had been a recent snowfall, and there was mud *everywhere*. I walked around a bit, and as I walked towards the back, I heard a tractor ploughing one of the fields. I walked towards the barbed wire fence and saw an elderly gentleman sitting on the tractor about 50 metres away from the fence line. I yelled out to him "Sir, your son asked me to come and see you. Can we please have a talk?" The man yelled back

"What do you want to talk about?" I yelled back "Well, you have been away from Church, and I was wondering if you would like to make a good confession." He said "If you want to see me, then you come over *here* and see me."



Now, again, the paddock was VERY muddy, I was in my cassock, and I had a nice pair of black shoes on. But I prayed "*Okay, Lord – if this is what You want....*"

I lifted my cassock up around my waist and threw some of it over my shoulder, climbed gingerly over the barbed wire fence, balancing on it, and then I jumped down from the fence into the muddy paddock – SPLASH!! I started walking through the mud – GLISH, GLISH, GLISH..... and towards this man. By the time I got to him, he had turned off his tractor and was sitting down on a haystack. My shoes and trousers were covered in mud. He looked at me, and as I got closer, I saw he had tears in his eyes. He said to me "You DID come... you decided to come to me." I replied "Of course I decided to come to you. You called for me, and I came. Now how about a good confession?" So there we were – sitting on a haystack – this man returning to the Sacrament of Penance after many, many years away. I was covered in mud, but he was covered in grace.

THE BEST \$20 I EVER SPENT!

It was 1995. I was travelling from Atlanta in Georgia to the state of Alabama. I was going to visit Mother Angelica who has the same surname that I have – Rizzo. She wanted us to meet for that reason! It was quite a long distance to travel, and on the way there I stopped at a little roadside diner for a meal. The waitress was hustling about the café clearing the tables and, after a little while, she came over and took my order. I noticed that she was pregnant. After I had finished my meal, I went up to pay for it, and then I went over to the waitress and gave her a tip. As I gave it to her, I said "Here – this is for you." I then pulled out a twenty dollar note from my wallet, and as I gave it her I said "And this is for the beautiful child that you have inside of you." She looked at me, took the twenty dollars, and got tears in her eyes. She then ran away into a room at the back



of the café. I wondered why she was so upset.

I left the café, and went to my car which was parked out the back. As I was about to get in, I was surprised to see the waitress approaching me, crying. She said to me "Father, I just want you to know that

when I finished work today, I was going to go and have

an abortion. I thought that I wouldn't be able to take care of this child. But after what you said to me, and giving me this tip, I have decided to keep my child."

I was gobsmacked. I must say that tears came to my eyes as well.

Owing to the grace of God and Divine providence, the waitress and I crossed paths, and a life was saved. It was without doubt the best \$20 I have ever spent!

People have asked me what inspired me to give the waitress the \$20? I can give no explanation for it – all I can say is that I felt inspired to do it.

Whose prayers were responsible for such an outpouring of God's grace at that particular moment? We will not know for certain in this life, but perhaps it was thanks to the prayers of the nuns I was on my way to visit, or thanks to the prayers of one of the many people who say the 'Spiritual Adoption' prayer every day. It is a prayer I would like to encourage you to pray:

Jesus my Lord, through the intercession of Mary Your Mother, who bore You so lovingly, and of St Joseph, strong man of faith who protected You both, I pray to You for the life of the unborn child who is in danger of abortion, the one I have spiritually adopted. Please give to the parents of this particular child the grace and courage to bring it to the life You have destined for him or her. Amen.



The most important person on earth is a mother.

She cannot claim the honour of having built Notre Dame Cathedral. She need not. She has built something more magnificent than any cathedral – a dwelling for an immortal soul, the tiny perfection of her baby's body.

The angels have not been blessed with such a grace. They cannot share in God's creative miracle to bring new saints to Heaven. Only a human mother can.

Mothers are closer to God the Creator than any other creature. God joins forces with mothers in performing this act of creation.

What on God's good earth is more glorious than this:
to be a mother?

Venerable Joseph Cardinal Mindszenty, 1892 – 1975

"GRANDPA ... I DON'T WANT YOU
TO GO TO HELL"

At Christmas time, we can think of those words of Scripture: *A child shall lead them.* A child, in its innocence, can touch hearts in a way that no adult can.

I can remember years ago when I was stationed in Post Falls, Idaho – one of the states bordering Canada – receiving a phone call from a gentleman saying "Father, will you please come and speak to my father? We have been praying for his conversion. He has never been baptised, and he is near death. Can you please come and see what you can do?" His granddaughter, Jennifer, had also been talking to him, trying to convince him to become a Catholic, but he kept on resisting. Jennifer pleaded with him "Gee Grandpa, I wish you would get baptised before you die, because I don't want you to go to Hell."

I got into my car and made the one-and-a-half-hour journey, praying the rosary for him on the way. I arrived, and was taken to the elderly gentleman lying in bed. I went over to him, and I started speaking about the Catholic faith. He looked at me, smiled a bit, but didn't have much of a reaction. I said "Sir, would you be interested in becoming a Catholic? May I have the opportunity of baptising you?" The man said nothing. I said "Sir, I would really be interested in baptising you and helping you. You are going

to die soon, and I would like to help you prepare for death." He said brusquely "I don't want to hear it from you – I want to hear it from Jennifer."

I gladly called Jennifer into the room! She encouraged him, saying "Please listen to Fr Rizzo, Grandpa. Please listen to what he has to say." I was amazed at the effect Jennifer's words had on him – they made him much more docile and receptive. Making the most of this opportunity, I said to him "I would like to talk to you about the Apostles' Creed, which summarises our Catholic faith." We went through the Creed and I explained it to him, phrase by phrase. I then asked him "Sir, would you like to be baptised?" His heart hardened once again, and he replied gruffly "Give me ONE good reason why I should be baptised." I took out the crucifix from my pocket and showed it to him, put it to his lips for him to kiss – which he did – and I said "I will give you FIVE good reasons why you should be baptised." I pointed to the five wounds of Christ upon the crucifix. I let him stay with the crucifix for some time. Tears came to his eyes.



And yes – he wanted to be baptised. With his family present, and to their great delight, I baptised him. Jennifer was absolutely beaming – she could not have been happier.

Since he had never been baptised before, all his sins were forgiven with that baptism, so there was no need for him to make his confession. At the same time, though, I encouraged him to make an act of contrition, expressing his sorrow for his sins. I then gave him the Sacrament of Confirmation, as that would elevate his state of glory in Heaven. He lovingly accepted that Sacrament too. I gave him the Anointing of the Sick, and after that I gave him his



first Holy Communion, which proved to be his last – his *Viaticum*, a Latin word meaning 'food for the journey', the journey to Heaven.

A few days later, on the feast of the Immaculate Conception, he died a holy death.

"A child shall lead them...."

THANK YOU, O HOLY ANGELS OF GOD!

October the 2nd is the feast of the Guardian Angels, those beautiful spiritual beings that Almighty God has assigned to each and every one of us, those spiritual beings to whom we pray:



Angel of God, my guardian dear, to whom God's love commits me here, ever this day be at my side, to light and guard, to rule and guide.

But are we familiar with the second part of that prayer?

*From stain of sin O keep me free,
and at my death my helper be.*

One day, I was called to the Baptist Hospital in Oklahoma city. A desperate woman asked me to see her husband who

was in a coma. She said to me "Father, my husband is going to die, and I am afraid that he is going to lose his soul. He is in a coma, and he has been away from the Church for many years. He really needs to make a good confession before he dies. Will you please come and see him?" I said "I am happy to go and see him, but if he is in a coma, I will not be able to hear his confession. I will be able to give him the Last Rites though." "Oh Father", she replied, very disappointedly, "I would love him to have the opportunity of making a good confession before he dies." My heart went out to this woman, and also to her husband. On the way to the hospital I prayed to St Joseph, the patron of the dying.

I arrived at the hospital and went as quickly as I could to the man's room. I was about to enter when a nurse stopped me and said "Excuse me, Sir, you cannot go in there. He is heavily sedated, and you won't be able to wake him." I replied "Thank you, nurse. I am a Catholic priest – I will just give him the Last Rites." But the nurse insisted that I do not enter the room.

So I stood at the entrance to the room, waiting for the nurse to leave so that I could go in to give the man the Last Rites. However, I changed my plans. I decided to pray to the man's Guardian Angel. I said to his Guardian Angel, "Please wake this man up, so that he may have the



opportunity to make a good confession." I also prayed to St Michael the Archangel, the one to whom we should pray in the midst of a spiritual battle, because – as we know – "Satan goes about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour."

Just as I finished saying the prayer to St Michael, the man started coughing and wheezing. I got the nurse's attention and said "Ma'am, this man is coming out of his sedation." She said "That's impossible – we heavily sedated him." She went running into the room and saw him coughing. I asked "Do you mind if I just come in briefly?" "You might as well, Reverend", she replied, and left the room.

Whilst he was coughing, the man opened his eyes and saw me. His eyes widened when he saw my Roman collar. I said "Sir, your wife called me here. She said you need to make a good confession." I encouraged him and showed him the crucifix. He then made a beautiful confession and said the Act of Contrition. I gave him absolution, and then gave him a small piece of the Host, which he was able to swallow. Immediately after that, he went back into his coma. The following day he died.

"Angel of God, my guardian dear..."

SAVED BY THE BLOWER!

Really, I cannot talk enough about the role of our Guardian Angels in our daily lives. Have you ever thought of the possibility, for example, of invoking the Guardian Angel of an individual before you speak to that person, to ensure that your conversation is one of charity?

Recently, when I was visiting Hawkesbury Hospital to see a patient, I was walking towards the footpath and saw an elderly lady sitting in a wheelchair, smoking. I thought to myself "I will say a few words to her", and I invoked the help of her Guardian Angel as I approached her. I said jokingly "Well, here you are, smoking away in front of the hospital – how does that look?!" She smiled, and we got talking. I told her that I would pray for her good health.

She called me 'Father' and told me that she was a Catholic, but that she hadn't been to Church for many years. I said to her "Well, I'm here. Would you like the chance of making a good confession?" I was also thinking to myself "Here we are on a public footpath – what can I do to make sure no one will overhear our conversation?" As soon as that thought came to mind, a nearby gardener turned on the blower and started blowing away all the loose grass from the footpath. Perfect timing!

A nice chat with that lady ended up with a wonderful confession, and a smile on both our faces as we parted. Thank you, Guardian Angels!

"HE LOOKS SO BEAUTIFUL"

St Paul, when describing Heaven, says "Eye hath not seen, neither has ear heard, neither has it entered the heart of man what God has prepared for those who love Him." These words certainly encourage us when it comes to pursuing the things of Heaven. One cannot begin to imagine the beauties of Heaven until the eyes of faith are no longer there – when we will instead have the eyes of reality to gaze upon this eternal bliss.

What is the essence of Heaven? It is to see God face to face, in what we call the Beatific Vision. We have reflections of that Beatific Vision here on earth in terms of the beauty and innocence of a soul basking in the state of Sanctifying Grace, a reflection of that God-given radiance that we will see one day, God-willing, in the eternal joys of Heaven.

Shortly after I was ordained, a young couple from Montana



called me. Their baby Elijah, who was born four days previously,

was struggling to breathe. I was living in Idaho at the time, and there was a huge blizzard which prevented me from

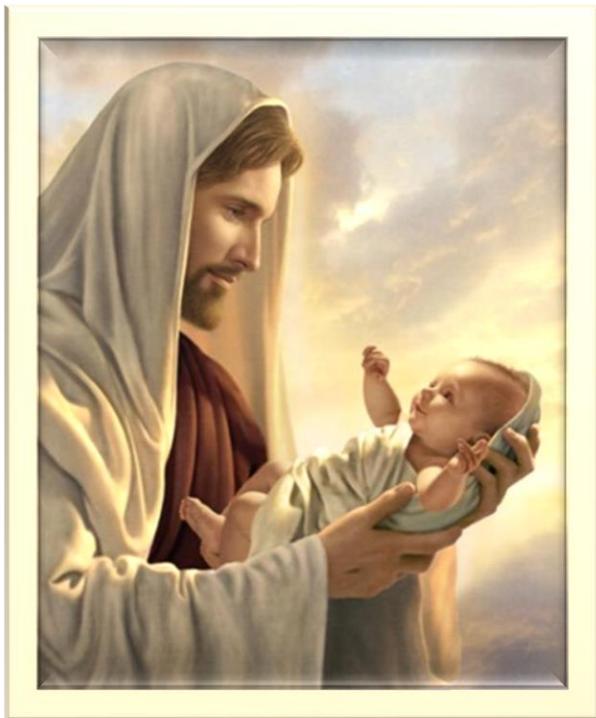
going to see them. I gave them instructions over the phone on how to baptise Elijah. As the mother poured the water over his head, I could hear her speaking the words "Elijah, I baptise you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen." So young Elijah, previously a son of Adam, at that moment became a child of Christ.

Sadly, Elijah died very soon after. When the snow had cleared and I could drive, I made the 4 hour journey there so that there could be a funeral for Elijah. When it comes to a funeral for a baby, the Mass is not a Requiem Mass – we don't wear vestments of grieving – we wear vestments of joy, the colour white. And we say a Mass in honour of the Angels.

So there I was in this little country funeral home, praying the Glorious Mysteries of the Rosary before this open casket. And there was young Elijah beautifully laid out in clothes of white. He looked like he was simply asleep.

After saying the Rosary, the funeral director was getting ready to close the lid of the casket. But the sister of this dearly departed Elijah eagerly came running up and grabbed the lid of the casket before the funeral director could close it. She said to the funeral director "Please, Sir, don't close that. He looks so beautiful."

What a moving sight – and how very true were her words. Young Elijah looked so beautiful not because of the clothes that he was wearing, but because of the sanctifying grace in his soul. The beautiful baptismal garment with which he was buried merely reminded us of the beauty of the baptismal innocence upon his soul.



The souls of baptised children immediately reach eternal bliss. They are the first to cry out those words of St Paul: "Eye hath not seen, neither has ear heard, neither has it entered the heart of man what God has prepared for those who love Him."

One day, when we see God face to face, we will be able to say for all eternity what that little girl said who saw her little brother in the casket: "He looks so beautiful."

COME, YOU BLESSED.....

My dear father died from cancer on July 25th, in the year 2000. He spent his last week at home where he was surrounded by his family, praying for him. But for some time before that, he was in hospital. I was living in Melbourne at the time, and I was able to get home a couple of weeks before he died. Owing to my priestly privilege, I was able to give him the consolations of the Church.



When he was lying in hospital quite ill, my nieces would visit him. At his bedside, they would sing hymns to Our Lady and hymns sung at Benediction such as 'O Salutaris Hostia' and 'Tantum Ergo'. Whilst they were singing one afternoon, the nurse came in and said to them "Ladies, when you are done here, can you please see the patient just a few doors down? He heard you singing, and he would like to talk to you." So when my nieces had finished visiting my father, they went to see this other gentleman, whose name was Bob. In the midst of their conversation, my nieces told him that they were singing for their grandfather. No names were mentioned. They also mentioned that they had an uncle who was a priest, and that he would be home soon to see his father. My nieces

asked him "Would you like to see Fr John when he comes back?" Bob agreed to seeing me.

I arrived from Melbourne a few days later, and my nieces told me about Bob. I went to see my father first, and after a while I said to him "Dad, there is somebody a few doors down who wants to see a priest." So off I went to see Bob. He said to me "So, you are the priest! I heard your nieces singing some beautiful hymns. I am not Catholic, but I remember going to a Catholic Mass with some of my friends when I was growing up. I remember some of those old hymns during the Mass." I asked him "Would you consider becoming a Catholic?" He said to me "Well, my brother died a Catholic..." I said to him "Well, what about you? Why don't you do the same?" He cautiously replied "Oh no, I am a Congregationalist, and my wife would be upset if she realised that I had become a Catholic." I said "You can still become a Catholic – it will just be between you, me and God. Your wife does not have to know." Bob seemed open to the suggestion, so I explained the Apostles' Creed to him.

We then began to talk about other things, and in the course of the conversation, I mentioned my name. He said to me "I knew a Rizzo when I was growing up." I asked "Would it be Tony Rizzo?" He said "Yes, that's right." I could hardly believe it! I said "That is my father – he is a few doors down,

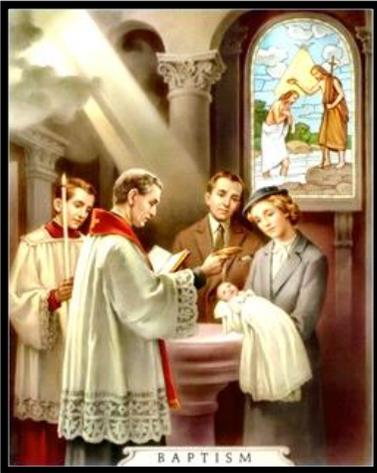
dying from cancer. Would you like to see him?" Bob did want to see him, and so the nurses came and rolled his bed into my father's room. They were very happy to see each other again. They chatted a bit, and after the nurses returned Bob to his room, I asked him "So, how about it? Would you like to become a Catholic?" He pondered my question for a few minutes, and then said "Yes, Father."

So to my great joy, I baptised him. Since he had never been baptised in the name of the Trinity, there was no need to hear his confession, as all his sins were forgiven when I baptised him. I then gave him a piece of the Holy Eucharist which I had with me to give my father. I also gave him the Sacrament of Confirmation, which raises the state of glory for a soul when it enters Heaven. And then I gave him the Anointing of the Sick. He received all these Sacraments in the space of twenty minutes. He was particularly pleased to receive the Holy Eucharist.

My father died about a week later. I kept on going to see Bob, bringing him Holy Communion every day until the day he died. He died about 5 days after my father.

I marvelled at how God worked in this situation – my dear nieces being with my father at that time and in that place, offering those hymns for the honour and glory of God. Little did they realise that it would also lead to the salvation of a soul.

The Beautiful Hands of a Priest



We need them in life's early morning,

We need them again at its close;

*We feel their warm clasp of true
friendship,*

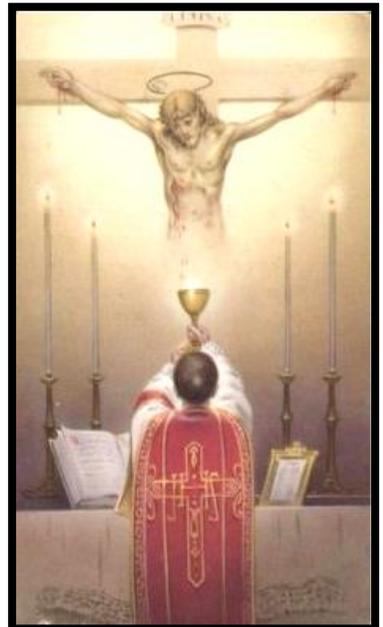
We seek them when tasting life's woes.

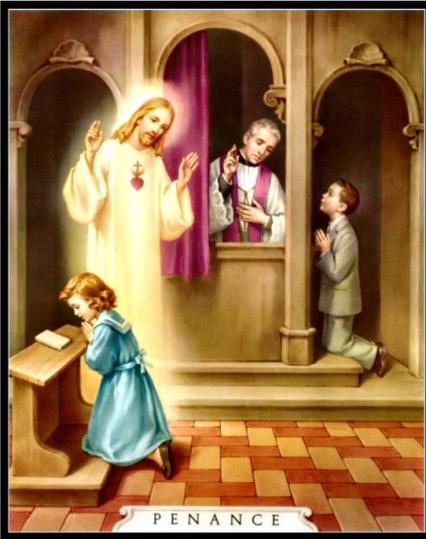
At the altar each day we behold them,

And the hands of a king on his throne

Are not equal to them in their greatness;

Their dignity stands all alone;





And when we are tempted and
wander,
To pathways of shame and of sin,
It's the hand of a priest that will
absolve us —
Not once, but again and again.

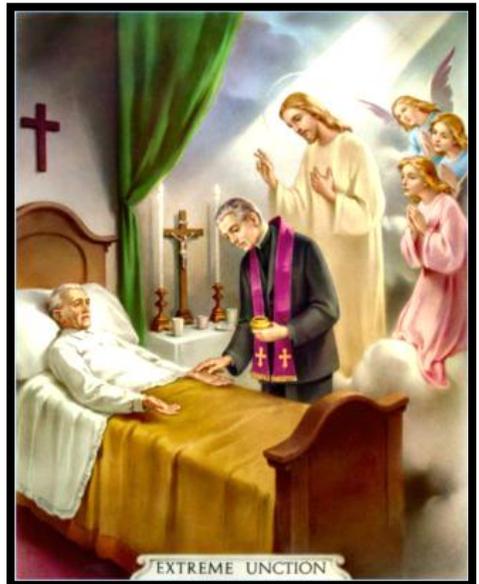
And when we are taking life's
partner,
Other hands may prepare us a
feast,
But the hand that will bless and
unite us —
Is the beautiful hand of a priest.





*God bless them and keep them all holy,
For the Host which their fingers caress;
When can a poor sinner do better,
Than to ask Him to guide thee and bless?*

*When the hour of death comes
upon us,
May our courage and strength
be increased,
By seeing raised over us in
blessing —
The beautiful hands of a priest.*



I DON'T WANT TO BURY ANY LUTHERANS!

As part of my priestly ministry in the past, I would be called upon to be a chaplain for some pilgrimages that would take place in Europe. I was thus very privileged to



*The Eucharistic
Miracle
of Lanciano*

see many of the beautiful shrines that Christianity has to offer. On one pilgrimage, we went to visit various shrines of Eucharistic miracles around Italy. There were two busloads of pilgrims – about 70 of us altogether. It was such a beautiful experience to see evidence of the Real Presence of Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament.

On this pilgrimage, there were two ladies who were twins. One was Catholic, and the other – whose name was Sally – was Lutheran. Every now and then I would be chatting with Sally and teasing her, saying "What are you – a Lutheran – doing on MY pilgrimage?!" She would chuckle.

There was one occasion when she was getting off the bus and lost her footing and tripped. I was able to stop her

falling, and I said to her jokingly "Sally, please be careful – I don't want to have to bury any Lutherans on my pilgrimage. It would give me a bad name!" She had a good laugh.

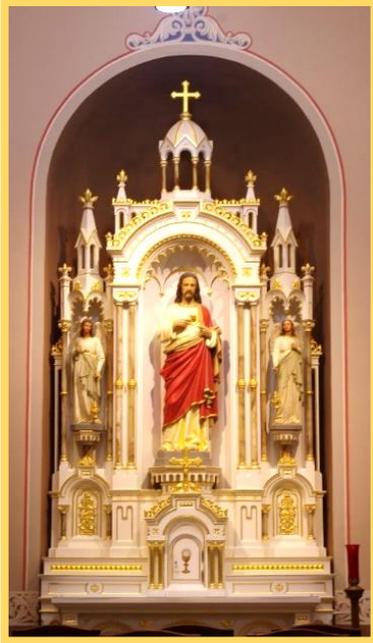
Years went by since that pilgrimage. One day I got a call out of the blue from Sally's twin sister. I had had no contact with them since the pilgrimage, but she had managed to track me down.

She said to me "Father, I am ringing to let you know that Sally died last night. Before she died, she said to me "You tell that priest Father Rizzo that he won't have to bury any Lutherans, because I am not dying a Lutheran – I am dying a Catholic!" Sally had converted to Catholicism before she died. She remembered well that pilgrimage, and those foolish words of mine "Sally, I don't want to be burying any Lutherans on my pilgrimage – it would give me a bad name!"

I was glad to have provided some humour that would add to her joy once she embraced Catholicism. I spoke with the priest who gave her the opportunity to convert, and he told me of a beautiful conversation he had had with Sally before she died.

We can remind ourselves once again of the great love and appreciation we should have of our Catholic faith. What a great faith you and I possess!

BLESSED BE JESUS
IN THE MOST HOLY SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR



One of the greatest treasures we could ever possess is the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Our Lord Jesus Christ under the appearances of bread and wine. Our Catholic faith reminds us to express piety, devotion and adoration to Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, the Bread of Life. The God of the tabernacle truly does desire to be the God of our hearts.

I find it so edifying to see people who have a great devotion to our Eucharistic Lord. I would like to tell you about just a couple of the many I have met.

I was once stationed as an assistant priest at a parish in Sydney's west. There was an elderly parishioner, by the name of Sanio, who would regularly make long visits to the Church. The parish priest would give him a key, and he would arrive as early as 5 o'clock in the morning. He would often still be there for the 9 o'clock morning Mass, sitting before the tabernacle all that time. I used to come in and see

him sitting in the corner. He wouldn't turn the lights on, and I would say "Sanio, how much do you charge to haunt a house?! Do you have to be here as such a spectral figure?!" He would smile.

Eventually Sanio got on in years, and he became ill and bedridden as his cancer advanced. One morning, the parish priest went to give him the Last Rites. When he returned to the presbytery, he said to me "Oh John, I forgot to give Sanio Holy Communion. Can you please take him Holy Communion sometime today?" I said "I will do that right away." I went to the tabernacle in the Church to put a Host in the pyx, and then went to this dying man's house. There he was lying in bed. His wife and daughter were nearby.



I looked at Sanio and said to him "Good morning, Sanio. I will give you a blessing with the Blessed Sacrament, and then I will give you Holy Communion." As soon as I blessed him, he breathed his last. A look of such peace and contentment was on his face.

I turned to his wife and I said "All his life he came to the tabernacle. At the end of his life, the tabernacle came to him." May he rest in peace.

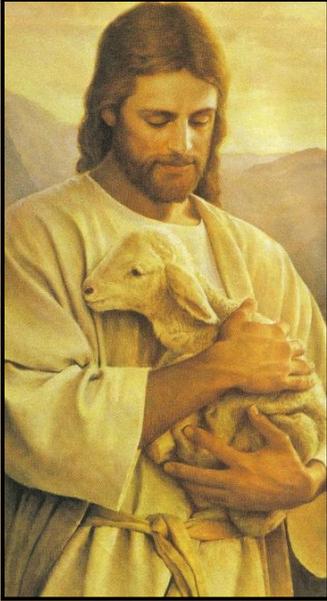
The other person who comes to mind is someone I met not long ago. I was at the Cathedral in Parramatta for an evening Rosary vigil. When we had finished, I locked up the Cathedral and turned off the lights. I came out a side entrance, and was walking down to the courtyard in front of the main entrance of the Cathedral. I saw a young man kneeling there at the doors, looking through the glass, praying.

I went over to him and asked "Would you like to go inside?" "Oh Father, I saw you locking up – I don't want to disturb you. I am happy here – I can see the tabernacle."

I was really amazed at this young man's faith. I said to him "No, I am going to unlock the door. You come in and spend time before Our Lord." He was deeply appreciative of the little effort that it took to unlock the door so that he could go inside. He spent about five minutes there, whilst I waited in the sacristy. After he finished praying, he came into the sacristy, vigorously shaking my hand and thanking me for the opportunity of making that visit.

How wonderful it was for me to see such an expression of faith – this young man happy to kneel outside on the steps in order to be near Our Lord. But he heard that invitation:

"Friend, come higher."



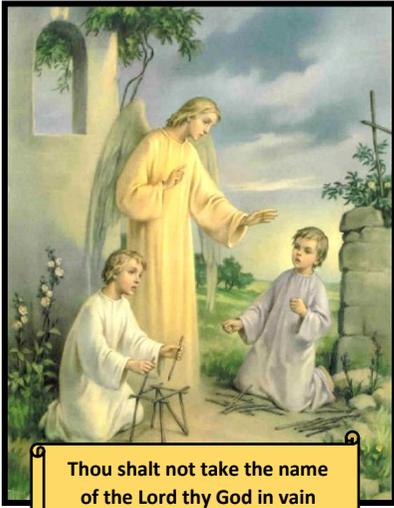
You have made us
for Yourself,
O Lord,
and our hearts are
restless
until they rest
in You.

St Augustine

RESPECT FOR THE HOLY NAME OF JESUS

We read in the Acts of the Apostles about Peter going to the temple to pray. There was a crippled beggar outside, and the beggar extended his hand, looking for an almsgiving. But Peter said to him "Silver and gold I have not, but what I do have I give unto you. In the name of the Lord Jesus, arise and walk." The crippled beggar immediately got up and walked away. Some of the Jews nearby witnessed this and Peter, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, said to these Jews "There is no other name under Heaven given to men whereby we must be saved."

This miracle can remind us of the beauty of the second Commandment: "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain." We should have great love and respect



for this holy name – the name "Jesus" – the Anointed One, the Messiah, our Saviour.

It was 1987. I was parish priest of a Church in Idaho Panhandle. There was a large family that regularly attended Mass, and their 7-year-old son was named Johnny. One day he was playing with a group of his mates when they got into an argument because Johnny was correcting them – they were misusing God's holy name. His friends were quite upset about this correction, and a fight began. Young Johnny ended up getting struck with a tree branch over his head. It was so bad that he got concussion and ended up in hospital. I was called to the hospital to see him and, not knowing the severity of his injury, I anointed him. He was fast asleep.

The following day I came to give Holy Communion to Johnny. As I was walking into his room, there was a nurse tucking him into bed so that he could have an afternoon nap. The nurse's back was to me, but young Johnny could

see me. Johnny knew that I was carrying the Blessed Sacrament and, as the nurse was tucking him in, he started unravelling the sheets. The nurse said "Johnny, what are you doing? I am trying to tuck you in!" Johnny said "The priest is here, and I want to get up and kneel down to receive Jesus in Holy Communion." What beautiful words! I went over to his bedside and said "No Johnny, stay in bed. I will give you Holy Communion in bed – Our Lord understands." He turned to the nurse and said to her "you please kneel? Jesus is in the room." The nurse looked at me and whispered "Father, what do you want me to do? I am a Presbyterian." I kindly told the nurse that she could leave the room whilst I spoke with Johnny.

I tell you this story to show not only the great love and respect that this young boy had for the Holy Name of Jesus, but his willingness to suffer for the Holy Name. And, as I witnessed, that great love and respect extended towards the Holy Eucharist.

Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.

HAIL, O CROSS

"Bless me Father, for I have sinned." We are familiar with those words, are we not? It is what we say at the beginning of the Sacrament of Penance. It gives us a sad but beautiful reality that we are expressing sorrow for sin, and we want to unload that burden of sin from our soul and give it back

to Christ in the confessional. The priest is 'another Christ' as he sits in the confessional. He is there as a doctor and a judge to help heal the wounds of the soul.

I was once an assistant priest in the Midwest of the United States. Having looked in the confessional in this parish Church, I noticed that there was no crucifix there. I went to the parish priest and I asked him "Father, would you mind if I put a crucifix in the confessional?" He said to me "Father, I have been here a number of years, and have never had a crucifix in the confessional. But since you are already decorating everything else in my church, you might as well put a crucifix there." I thanked him half-sheepishly, and I put a nice crucifix in the confessional.

One Saturday afternoon when I was in the presbytery, the parish priest walked in and sat down at the table with me. He said "John, I want to thank you for putting that crucifix in the confessional." I said with a smile "Gee, Father, that was a few weeks ago – you are a bit slow on your gratitude!" He said "Well, today I had a young man come to confession. I am not breaking the seal of confession here, but I could tell when I was giving him absolution that there was something on his mind. He stopped me and said "Father, wait a minute – I have something else to confess. I was hiding it from you, but I am looking at the crucifix here, and now I want to tell you what I was hiding."

Yes indeed, what power there is in the crucifix. The crucifix



helps us to be truly sorry for our sins, because it reminds us that our sins are no small thing. But the

crucifix also reminds us that Jesus loves us so much that He willingly took our sins upon Himself, and that we need have no fear of confessing our sins. How He longs for souls to approach Him in the confessional, so that He can pour out His mercy on them.



An Act of Contrition

O my God,
I am heartily sorry for
having offended You,
and I detest all my sins,
because I dread the loss of
heaven and the pains of hell;
but most of all because
they offend You, my God,
Who are all good and
deserving of all my love.
I firmly resolve,
with the help of Your grace,
to confess my sins,
to do penance
and to amend my life.

WRONG NUMBER – NO, RIGHT NUMBER!

It was the year 2011. One day I was asked by a family to go to St George Hospital in Kogarah to be at the bedside of their dying father. They were ready to turn the life support off, and they wanted me to be there to administer the Last Rites and spend a little time with them and say a few prayers with them.

Finding myself in the Intensive Care Unit, I saw all the signs asking that mobile phones be turned off, but I forgot that I had my phone in my pocket. Suddenly it rang – “*Oh no!*” I looked at it, and it said “Private Number”.

Not being able to return the phone call, I immediately ran out of the ICU, ran down another corridor, came out of the unit, and stood in another hallway. I answered the phone and said “Fr Rizzo speaking.” A man's voice on the other end said “Oh, sorry, mate – I have the wrong number.” He hung up.

I thought to myself “Wrong number? I left that dying man and ran all this way for nothing.” As I was about to retrace my steps, a man came up to me and said anxiously “Oh Father, Father – are you a Catholic priest?” I said “Yes.” He said “Will you please come and see my wife. She is dying and she needs the Sacraments.” Immediately I followed him and went to see his wife.



As I entered the room holding my phone, I said to her "I think your Guardian Angel just rang me, because your husband never would have seen me had I not had to leave the Intensive Care Unit to answer my phone." She smiled, thanked me, and said "Father, what a great consolation to have you here. May I please make my confession?" I heard her confession and gave her Holy Communion and the Last Rites. She died a few hours later.

I thought to myself "What if I had turned my phone off? What if I did not answer my phone? It was not the wrong number – it was the right number."

It is amazing how our angels work for us at all times, being instruments of divine providence.

THE YEAR 2020

What a year 2020 was – the year of Covid. Our world was turned upside down. We all learnt to adjust to a different way of living, and of even being under lockdown. We will never forget what this meant for the Easter Season – Churches were closed, and the faithful were unable to attend the Services of Holy Week and celebrate the Resurrection of the Lord. It was indeed a trying time. But in spite of this, we Catholics, as a whole, learnt to improvise and still do what we could to heal the wounds of our soul.



During the lockdown, different people used to come to see me to receive the Sacraments. One Friday evening, the week before Holy

Week, a group of bikies came onto the property, and asked me "Are you the priest who hears confession?" "Yes", I said. Each of them then went to confession, and afterwards they said "We are afraid of this Covid. We are afraid of dying." What a great act of faith it was on their part, these well-intentioned men expressing their fear of dying but making sure that they were looking after their souls.

A few days later, on the Tuesday of Holy Week, a gentleman drove into the car park. I was outside, so I went

over to him and asked him if I could help him. He simply said "Father, I have been away from Church for a long time. This Covid is really scaring me, and I would like to make a good confession." I said "Sure". And then he said "There is something you should know, Father. This will be my first confession. I am already 45 years old." I assured him that it was no problem at all that this was his first confession. After his very good, humble, contrite confession, I asked him "Would you like Holy Communion?" He said "Father, this will be my First Holy Communion." So there he was, sitting in the car park under the shadows of Tyburn Priory, having made his first confession and his First Holy Communion.

How much good will come out of this Covid existence? Through faith, people are uniting themselves more closely, more intimately with God. And perhaps some of them are taking a good, hard look at their souls as they remind themselves of an immortal soul that is united to a mortal body – a body that will eventually die, but a soul that will live for all eternity either in Heaven or Hell.

We can see any type of illness or plague or any adversity through the eyes of faith. And when we do so, our eyes are truly opened. There is no such thing as isolation when it comes to God. It is the opportunity for a deeper union with Him Who loves us.

A MOTHER'S LOVE

When we consider the love of a mother's heart, it is truly a love that tops the list, so to speak. As St Therese said:

*The loveliest masterpiece
of the heart of God
is the heart of a mother.*



To contemplate the love that a mother has for her children is one of the best ways to understand love. A mother loves her children unconditionally – and mostly, that love is united to sacrifice.

I remember a lady named Annette, who was dying of cancer. Annette and her husband John had a large family, and the children were being brought up in a beautiful Catholic environment. The family would regularly come to Mass – not just on a Sunday, but on weekdays as well. They would pray the Rosary together as a family. Annette was a very prayerful woman and would spend time alone before the Blessed Sacrament. Even at night, on a First Friday evening for example, she would come to our little

chapel. When it was cold, and I would plead with her to turn the heating on, she would say "Oh no, Father, I'm fine. I will just wrap myself in a blanket."

The cancer advanced, and one day I went to visit her when she was in her sick bed. I asked her "Annette, is there anything I can do for you?" "Well Father", she replied, "I have seen all my children – except one – make their First Holy Communion. I am praying that God will allow me to live long enough to let me see my youngest child receive his First Holy Communion." I said "Annette, we are going to arrange that. As far as I am concerned, your prayer has already been answered."

I called the child, and I asked him about the Holy Eucharist. He answered my questions correctly because of the good catechetics he had received from his mother and father. I turned to Annette and said to her "Annette, I am coming here tomorrow morning to say Mass, here in your house, and you can witness from your bedroom your son making his First Holy Communion." Tears of joy ran down her face – she couldn't thank me enough.

The following morning, we did exactly that. A few other parishioners who were close friends of the family also came, and sang some hymns during the Mass. Annette, the proud mother, was beaming in spite of her suffering, smiling from ear to ear when she saw her youngest son



kneeling at the foot of her bed as he made his First Holy Communion.

Annette's one dying wish was granted. Sadly, she died about two weeks later.

I share this story with you because it really expresses the love of the heart of a mother. I was very moved at witnessing such

love – and what an honour it was for me to have been able to help fulfil Annette's last wish.

Annette's love for her children first and foremost concerned their *souls* – and, as such, that love truly did image the maternal heart of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, the Mother of us all, who loves us, her children, and wants to ensure that we are ever so close to the Sacraments and her Son.

THE ROSARY

The Rosary is a devotion in honour of Our Lady. It consists of praying decades of the Rosary (1 Our Father, 10 Hail Marys and 1 Glory Be) whilst meditating on a mystery of the life of Our Lord or Our Lady.



When Our Lady appeared to three young children in Fatima (Portugal) in 1917, on each occasion she said to them:

"Pray the Rosary every day"

Prayers of the Rosary

Our Father, Who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth, as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

At the end of each decade: O my Jesus, forgive us our sins, and save us from the fires of Hell. Lead all souls to Heaven, especially those in most need of Thy mercy.



A Mother's Prayer for Her Children

Holy Mother Mary,
who by virtue of your divine motherhood,
have become mother of us all,
I place the charge which God has given me
under your loving protection.
Be a protecting Mother to my children.
Guard their bodies and keep them
in health and strength.
Guard their minds
and keep their thoughts ever holy
in the sight of their Creator and God.
Guard their hearts and keep them pure and strong
and happy in the love of God.
Guard always their souls and ever preserve in them,
faithfully, the glorious image of God
whom they received in Holy Baptism.
Always Mother, protect them and keep them
under your Mothering care.
Supply in your all-wise motherhood,
for my poor human deficiencies
and protect them from all evil.

Amen.

Queen of the Most Holy Family, Pray for us.

A BEAUTIFUL LESSON FOR ME

During the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s, not much was known about this debilitating disease, at least initially. It was a horrible disease that would immediately attack the immune system, and would sometimes bring about a slow and agonising death. How contagious was AIDS? No one could say at that stage, so there was much fear amongst the population.

I was stationed at Immaculate Conception Parish in Post Falls, Idaho. One Tuesday night, I received a phone call from a woman crying uncontrollably. "Father, Father, will you please come and see my son. He is dying of AIDS." The first thought that came to mind was "*Oh, that horrible disease.*"

I asked her where she was calling from. "I am calling from Harbour View Medical Centre in Seattle." I said "Ma'am, I am **five** hours away. Do you realise that I am in the state of Idaho – another state altogether." "Father", she said, "I have called so many different parishes, so many different priests. I am going through the Yellow Pages looking for other parishes. No priest will come and see my son because they are afraid of this AIDS disease. Will you please come?"

How could I say 'No'? How could I ignore the pleas of this grieving mother? In spite of my own reticence and reluctance, I prayed "Well, Lord, if I am to lay down my life

for my sheep like You did, then Your Holy will be done." I thought of the life of St Aloysius Gonzaga, a 21-year-old seminarian who died during the bubonic plague, the Black Death of Europe, whilst he was taking care of plague victims himself.

I had to leave quickly, to give me every chance of getting there in time. I left at 9pm, taking the Holy Eucharist and the Holy Oils with me so that I could administer the Last Rites. I went across the state of Washington in the darkness of the night, spending the journey in prayer. I prayed the Rosary over and over again; I prayed to St Joseph, to my patron saints, and to the Guardian Angel of that dying young man, asking them all to let me get there in time.

I arrived at the hospital at about 2am. I was warmly greeted by nurses and doctors who were expecting my arrival. I was quickly escorted in, donned a plastic apron and a mask, and went into this young man's room.

What a sight awaited me. The doctors and nurses were all wearing protective clothing, cautiously keeping their distance. In sharp contrast, stretched over the bed of her son dying from AIDS, was the mother – kissing her son and embracing him, holding his hand, whispering into his ear, not wearing any protective gear whatsoever. She had no fear of this disease, unlike everyone else in that room. All she had was love for her son. To this day, 34 years later, the remembrance of that sight moves me. It was such a lesson for me – a lesson in the love of a mother.



Our Lady of Sorrows came to mind. She, likewise, had to witness her own Son die before her very eyes.

But my thoughts went further than this. I thought of the love of the Blessed Virgin Mary who, in spite of the contagion of sin on the part of sinful mankind, wants to embrace us

and be by our side. If we are spiritually dying because of our sins, she wants to be ever so close to us and see our health restored by being reconciled to God.

If only we realise the importance of invoking the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, especially in times of temptation and sin. She is our Mother, and she is so ready and willing to come to our aid, if only we call upon her.

The mother looked up and saw me. She smiled and thanked me again and again. I went straight to the task, and asked everybody to leave the room. I heard this dying man's last confession amidst his gasping breath, and gave

him absolution. I then asked his mother to come back into the room so that she could witness him receiving the Anointing of the Sick. This was a great consolation for her, as well as for me. I gave him a small portion of the Host, and I gave the rest of the Host to his grieving mother.

I left there so fulfilled and happy that I had the opportunity to administer the Last Rites to this young man. What graces I received that night.

I got back into my car for the five hour journey back to my parish. I arrived at about 7.30 in the morning – half an hour before my 8.00 morning Mass, which I offered for that dying man and his wonderful, grieving mother.

Our Lady of Sorrows, pray for us.

REMEMBER, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known in any age that anyone who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, or sought thy intercession was left unaided.

Inspired with this confidence, therefore, I fly to thee, O Virgin of virgins, my Mother; to thee do I come; before thee I stand, sinful and sorrowful.

Do not, O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise my prayers, but graciously hear and answer them. Amen.

THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST IN A PRIEST

When we consider the presence of Christ, we often think of His Sacramental presence – the Holy Eucharist, the Blessed Sacrament – His Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity that dwells in the tabernacle of every Catholic Church in the world. Many Catholics understand this. However, those Catholics of weak faith or no faith do not.



Sometimes the presence of Christ is only realised in their midst in terms of a priest, whose path they may cross. I often travel, and do so wearing my Roman collar so that others recognise that I am a priest. I can recount several occasions where strangers have approached me either to talk about problems that they have, or to make a good confession. I have heard many confessions at train stations and airports. One day when I was on a train platform at Parramatta, within the span of half an hour, three different people came to me asking me to hear their confession. The last one was responsible for me missing my train! Oh well...!

Once when I was on a plane, a flight attendant came and sat next to me and whispered "Father, will you hear my confession?" Of course I heard it. She said to me afterwards

"Father, I hope you don't mind." I replied jokingly "I don't mind at all, but if the pilot comes back here looking for confession, I might get a little nervous!" She smiled and walked off.

Seeing a priest can also make people upset or agitated. I have had people pass me and say unpleasant things, to which I would just utter a prayer under my breath – a prayer of forgiveness, a prayer for that person's conversion. Such is the presence of Christ that I want in my heart so that no matter who comes my way – either for good or for bad – I hope I can correspond with a Christ-like disposition.

When I was newly ordained and stationed with another priest – Fr Lemieux – in North London, on the way to Church on Saturday mornings, we would customarily walk by a building called the "Red Rose Socialist Centre." We would stop in front of it, say a Hail Mary, and invoke Our Lady of Fatima for the conversion of the people who worked there.

One Saturday when we did this, there was someone inside who was looking at us praying. We continued walking along the footpath after we had prayed, and a man came running out of the building towards us, yelling. We didn't know what he wanted, so we waited. He asked "What on earth were you doing outside that building? Why did you

stop there?" Fr Lemieux said "We stopped there so that we can pray for the people who work there." He asked "Why did you do that?" I answered "Because socialism is against



the Catholic Church. We were praying for the conversion of Socialists." At that point he looked at Fr Lemieux, and spat in his face. Father took a handkerchief out of his pocket, wiped his face, and said to the man "Thank you, Sir, for helping me to be like Our Saviour Jesus Christ, who was also spat at in the

face." I must admit, my own Sicilian disposition may not have said that if he had spat in MY face - but nonetheless, truly the presence of Christ can overcome any evil whatever.

WE KNOW NOT THE DAY NOR THE HOUR

As a priest, I love to be called to the beside of the dying, to give them an opportunity to make their peace with God.

In my years as a priest, not only am I often by the bedside of the dying, but I am also by the graveside of the deceased. When a priest officiates at a funeral, and he comes to the

Rite of Committal, he reads the following from the 6th Chapter of St John's Gospel:

"This is the will of My Father", says the Lord, "that I should lose nothing of all that He has given to Me, and that I should raise it up on the last day."



The Seven Sacraments

Baptism

Penance

Holy Eucharist

Confirmation

Marriage

Holy Orders

Anointing of the Sick

What particularly strikes me from this passage are the words "That I should lose nothing of all that He has given to Me." God the Father does not want His priests to lose any of the souls under their care. He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to pay the price of our sins through His sacrificial death on the Cross. As a priest, I am a mediator between God and man, and it is

my role to perpetuate Our Lord's act of Redemption – particularly through the Sacraments.

The Sacraments instituted by Christ are of paramount importance in the life of a Catholic. Why? Because they give us grace – DIVINE LIFE – the very life of God. What can be more important or precious to us than that? And how especially important the Sacraments are to those who are dying.

One day in 2011, when I was chaplain at a hospital in Christchurch, New Zealand, I was called to the hospital – but unfortunately, not to the bedside of the dying, but to the morgue of the deceased. The word morgue comes from the Latin *mortuus*, meaning death. I was called there by the son of a woman who was found dead in her home. She had already been deceased for about a day when the police found her. It took another day to find the son and notify him of his mother's death.

I was there in 5 minutes, but it took another 20 minutes to get through security. Hurriedly I went through the entrance, and saw the son with his wife. The body of his deceased mother was laid out on the table. I looked at her face – there was a look of despair and anguish on it. That look is something I will never forget. Many times I have seen a peaceful countenance on those who are deceased – on people of faith who have prayed and prepared for the last day. Sadly, I didn't see this in this woman's countenance. I cannot presume the state of this woman's

soul – I can only hope and pray that she pleaded for God's mercy before she died – but I couldn't help thinking of the words we pray in the Litany of the Saints:

"From a sudden and unprovided death, deliver us O Lord."

We must remind ourselves that God's mercy is a mercy that must be invoked, be asked for, and not presumed.

I turned to the son to give him my condolences, and he angrily said to me "What took you so long to get here?" I said to him "Sir, I was called, I came in 5 minutes, but it took another 20 minutes to get through security." I said the prayers for the deceased, and again offered my condolences to the son. He was still angry. I asked him "Do you ever go to Church?" "I used to go a long time ago, but I don't go anymore." I asked "Did your mother go to Church?" "No, it's been many years since she went to Church." I simply said "I will pray for her and I will pray for you." I left the room.

"This is the will of My Father", says the Lord, "that I should lose nothing of all that He has given to Me, and that I should raise it up on the last day". In other words, I want to be there for the living, not the dead. Of course, this man from New Zealand had no choice but to call me after his mother had died, but how many people *do* have the opportunity to call a priest before it's too late, but don't bother or don't even think about it? I cannot give the



Sacraments to a dead person. I cannot hear their confessions and absolve them from their sins. I cannot give them the Anointing of the Sick or the Holy Eucharist. I cannot prepare them for God's judgement, which will come to each and every one of us

the moment we die. I want to be there to invoke God's mercy upon souls whilst there is still time.

But no matter how much zeal we priests may have to save souls, many times there will be a cold heart or deaf ears from those who do not want to correspond to the grace of God. It is my greatest sadness to encounter such souls.

Perhaps this story can remind us to be prepared at all times – we know not the day nor the hour. Any one of us may die a sudden death – without time to receive the Sacraments of Holy Mother Church. But let us ensure that it is not an *unprovided* death. Let us remain in the state of grace by regularly availing ourselves of the Sacraments whilst we have the opportunity – and so always be prepared to meet our Maker and give an account of our lives.

THE POWER OF PRAYER

A few years ago, I read this true story. It touched me deeply, and I would like to share it with you.

Back in the 1940s, in the Midwest of the United States, there was a young man named Clement who grew up in a large family. His mother was a very fervent Catholic. His father used to be a practising Catholic, but eventually became very hostile to the Catholic Church. This did not stop Clement from growing up in a loving family and seeing the beautiful example of his mother and his siblings going to Sunday Mass and doing their best to practise their faith in spite of the poor example of their father.

One day, Clement said to his mother "Mum, I want to become a priest." Obviously, the mother was very happy to hear this, as were his siblings, and they encouraged him. After rejoicing with him, his mother said to Clement "But now you must tell your father."

Clement went to his father who was in the living room reading the newspaper, and said to him "Dad, I just want you to know that I want to become a priest one day." His father laid his newspaper on his lap and said to him "In that case, son, I hate you, I hate your priesthood and I hate your Church." Those harsh words shocked Clement, but he was able to say with an even tone and much patience "Well Dad, I am going to pray for your conversion, and that one day before you die, the Crucified Christ will come to you,

and that you will ask forgiveness of your sins." "You do that", his father answered angrily.

Clement entered the seminary to study for the priesthood. Whenever he would return home for his holidays, his mother and siblings were overjoyed to see him, but his father always greeted him with those same words: "Son, I hate you, I hate your priesthood and I hate your Church." Clement always had the same response: "Dad, I am going to pray that the Crucified Christ will come to you before you die, and that you will ask forgiveness of your sins."

Even on the day of Fr Clement's ordination, and on every Sunday when Father would visit his family, the father and son exchanged those same words. All Father Clement could do was pray for his father – and this is what he did every time he offered Holy Mass.

The years went by, and Fr Clement's father took ill. Father went home and said to his father "Dad, before you die, I want you to make your peace with God." With his gasping breath, he said "Son, what have I said to you all these years? I hate you, I hate your priesthood and I hate your Church." These words always saddened Fr Clement, but especially now. He wanted so much to give his father the Sacraments but, with his father's hardened heart, it was impossible. Fr Clement simply said to him, as he has said all those years, "Dad, I am going to pray that the Crucified Christ will come

to you before you die, and that you will ask forgiveness of your sins."

Eventually his father died, seemingly unrepentant. His death devastated poor Fr Clement and his family.

Shortly after his father's funeral, Fr Clement drove to the convent of the Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration in Clyde, Missouri. He had never been there before, but he wanted to visit them to receive some consolation from these devout Religious Nuns who spend many hours before the Blessed Sacrament.

He was received into the parlour, and Mother Superior came into the room. As Father Clement was speaking to Mother, a young nun from the community knocked on the door. She asked Mother Superior if she could enter and speak. Mother said to her "Yes, my child – what do you have to say?" This young nun turned to see the priest, and asked him rather nervously "Excuse me, Father. Are you Father Clement?" "Yes I am". The nun said "Father, I have something to tell you. As I was praying in our Adoration Chapel just now, the Lord said to me: "Go to the parlour, and



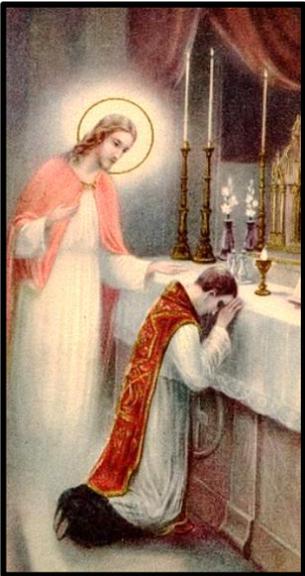
tell Father Clement that his father saw the Crucified Christ before he died, and that he asked forgiveness of his sins."

This shocked Fr Clement, as you can imagine! Father had never darkened the doors of this convent before, and had never seen or met this nun. Tears of emotion filled his eyes.

He left that convent with great joy. His father had gazed upon the Crucified Christ through the haze of death, asking forgiveness of his sins. His prayers had been answered!

What great power there is in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and what great power there is in the priesthood. St John Vianney said that the majority of mankind would save their souls through the intercession of a holy priest.

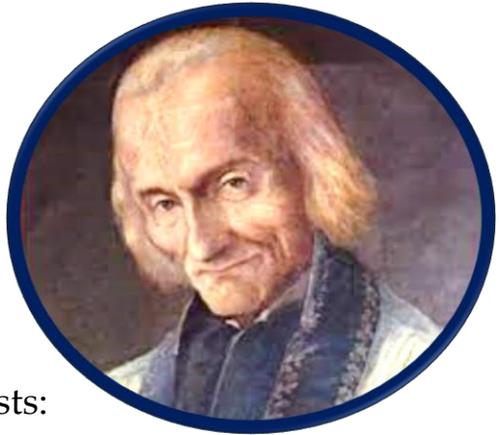
My Lord and my God!



"When a priest celebrates Mass, he honours God, he rejoices the angels, he edifies the Church, he helps the living, he obtains rest for the dead, and makes himself a partaker of all that is good.

The Imitation of Christ
Book IV, Ch. V

St John Mary Vianney
(1786-1859 - also
known as *the Curé of
Ars*) is the patron saint
of all priests. His body
is incorrupt. He wrote
the following about priests:



"Oh, how great is a priest! The priest will not understand the greatness of his office until he is in Heaven. If he understood it on earth, he would die – not of fear, but of love."

"Without the priest, the Passion and Death of our Lord would be of no avail. It is the priest who continues the work of redemption here on earth... What use would a house be filled with gold, were there no one to open its door? The priest holds the keys to the treasures of Heaven: it is he who opens the door: he is the steward of the good Lord; the administrator of His goods."

"The priest is not a priest for himself, he is a priest for you. After God, the priest is everything."

You are a Priest Forever

To live in the midst of the world, without wishing its pleasures;

To be a member of each family, yet belonging to none;

To share all sufferings;

To penetrate all secrets;

To heal all wounds;

To go from men to God, and offer Him their Prayers;

To return from God to men, to bring pardon and hope;

To have a heart of fire for charity

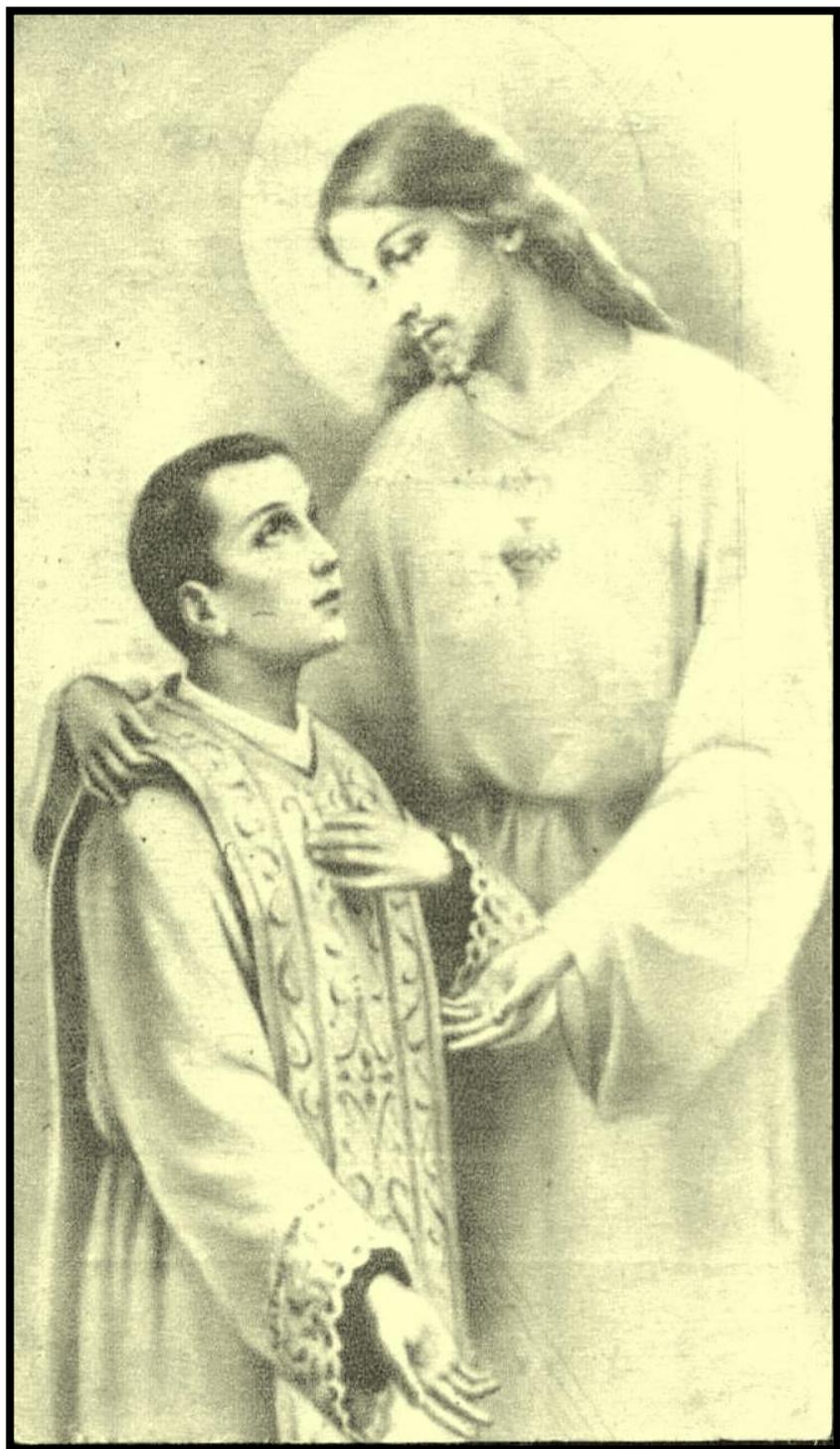
And a heart of bronze for chastity;

To teach and to pardon,

Console and bless always—

What a glorious life!

And it is yours, O Priest of Jesus Christ!





This booklet is in memory of

Fr Kenneth Walker FSSP

1985-2014

Although I never had the pleasure of meeting Fr Kenneth Walker, I have an affinity with him because we were both ordained on May the 19th – 27 years apart.

Father had been a priest for only two years when he was murdered by an intruder in the rectory in Phoenix, Arizona, where he was living.

Father's death touched the world. His beautiful, priestly heart is revealed in the application letter he wrote to the seminary:

“God, in His infinite love, desires all men to be saved and so achieve their true end. Along with the Church, then, I am deeply grieved by these errors concerning the nature and dignity of man accepted by so many people in the world, which deviate them from their supernatural end. In full view of the situation in the world, then, the only vocation that I could be satisfied with, as a work, would be one that would be dedicated to bringing people to salvation in whatever way God wills for me to do so.”



REQUIESCAT IN PACE