

Patris Corde: An Epitome of Joyful Priesthood

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Abstract

The revelation of God as Father has a significant impact on theology and the way priests are encouraged to give the experience of God's paternal love and care through their own lives. To participate in the "Divine Fatherhood," a priest needs to broaden the vertical and horizontal horizon necessary to life and a theological confirmation of the priest's indispensable and irreplaceable role as minister of sacraments for the sake of human salvation. The traits of St. Joseph described in the Apostolic Letter of Pope Francis, *Patris Corde*, will help us understand these points to a great extent. This article also suggests some psycho-spiritual supplements to strengthen the priests to participate joyfully in their ongoing formation.

Keywords: Divine Fatherhood, Joyful Participation, Ongoing formation

Introduction

Universal Church suitably celebrated St. Joseph's Year with many reflections and action plans. The papal document, *Patris Corde* (With a Father's Heart), published on the 150th Anniversary of the Proclamation of Saint Joseph as the Patron of the Universal Church, itself was enticing and a way pointer to those of different walks of life, especially the priests. Pope Francis has commented that our world today needs fathers in this document. He is not referring to the society alone, but the Church as well; "the Church too needs fathers." Pointing to St. Joseph, Pope says that priests should be like fathers, who are

“the earthly shadow of the Heavenly Father.” Thus, being a priest means being like the Heavenly Father, in which he finds the fulfillment of the joy of Priesthood. One can attain real happiness through the most significant possible assimilation (*homoiosis*) to God, the Father. Participation in the Fatherhood of God is the best possible way for a priest to be joyful. However, today, we see priests and religious are not happy and running away from the realities of the world they live in and are hesitant to face it. Bishop Robert Barron said recently:

If we define our values, truth, and purpose, we effectively lock ourselves into the tiny space of what we can imagine or control. When we follow these prompts of our culture today, we become cramped souls... The entire point of a Catholic intellectual formation is to produce *magnae animae* - great souls.

Today we need the priests who seek the will of God to be open to the realities and to be great souls rather than confining themselves and being satisfied within the tiny space that they can control.

Priesthood – Participation in the Divine Fatherhood

God, who is love in Himself, calls every human being to participate in His Fatherhood. In His image and likeness, He created every human being in this world. Both the creation accounts in Genesis make it clear that, unlike other creatures, God took special care in the making of humans. He created them with a personal touch (See Gen 1:26-27; 2:7, 22). God has formed human beings in his image and likeness, making human beings unique or different from others. Thus, we all are called to be like God and participate in his divine Fatherhood by very nature. And it is the call for every human being, incredibly the Christian faithful, to grow to the likeness of God, the Father. Thus, a priest is chosen from the Christian faith is specially called to participate in the divine Fatherhood of God.

The Meaning of Participation – Divinization of Human Beings. The term “participation” comes from the Latin verb *participare*, meaning ‘to take part,’ or ‘to share.’ Hence, participation in the divine nature does not remain conceptual, but as Christians, “it is a reality that determines human beings’ sense of life in the present.” Even though, as Christians, we live our lives oriented towards an eschatological life, by way of participation, we share in the divinity of God in our life here itself. Thus, we become a new being, “transformed into the spiritual

existence of God,” which is the ultimate goal of every Christian faithful. This would be and must be revealed in our day-to-day life situations.

St. Peter, in his Epistle, says that all those who believe in Christ are “participants of the divine nature” (2 Pet 1:4). Participation is not a philosophical formulation, but it pertains to reality. By way of participation, we all attain an intimate connection with God. God, in His love, gives human beings a share in his own life and human beings partake in it. *Lumen Gentium* clearly states: “The eternal Father created the whole world by a free and hidden plan of His wisdom and goodness. He planned to raise men to a participation of the divine life.” This reveals the plan of God that has been revealed through us in the whole history of salvation.

Hence, human participation in God means both the “humanization” of God and the “divinization” of man. Participation, therefore, would imply “deifying transformation of man.” In the case of a priest, since he continues the mediator service of Christ, participation would demand a complete transformation of oneself to share with the divine nature and its qualities. It is a two-fold process of self-emptying and fashioning oneself according to divine nature.

Fatherhood – The Divine Nature of God. God is often portrayed as furious, arrogant, punishing, accusing, and cruel. But at the same time, God is often described as a compassionate, merciful, saving, liberating, and consoling being. For instance, in the book of Jonah, we hear Jonah saying, “for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing” (Jon 4:2), which speaks of the fundamental nature of God. We find many such instances (Ex 34:6-7; Num 14:18; Neh 9:31; Joel 2:13; Hos 11:8-9) in the Old Testament that reveal the fundamental nature of God.

In the same way, we find a God who moves along with human beings. In the book of Exodus, we find God traveling along with the people of Israel, all through their journey, “in a pillar of cloud by day, to lead them along the way, and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light...” (Ex 13:21). We find God as One who fights for them, providing food and water for them, protecting them from all dangers, and a God who accompanies them always. A close analysis of all these traits reveals that they resemble the qualities of a father.

Our fathers manifest many of these traits, which may differ according to the situation. At times, he may behave like a friend, loving, protecting, criticizing, accusing us as situations demand, and at other times he may punish us and be arrogant towards us when we go wrong. Being a father, all these qualities are necessary depending on each circumstance. A good and responsible father should play all these roles whenever necessary, which would benefit the children and not to harm them. All these traits add to God's divine nature, which is love itself. In the Scriptures, God's love is chiefly presented as a parent's love for their children (See Mt 23:37; Lk 13:34).

The Fatherhood of God is not a human projection onto God but the Father's ontological relational mode of existence with the Son. The revelation of God as Father, the loving Father of the Son and his human creation, has had a significant impact on theology and the way priests are encouraged to give the experience of God's 'parental' love and care through their own lives. The Son has put across this message of the loving Father throughout his earthly life and supremely in his sacrifice for the world's sins. This is what is expressed in the prayer of the Syro-Malabar liturgy: "You are holy. You alone are the true Father! All Fatherhood in heaven and on earth comes from You."

Participation in Christ, the Icon of the Father. Human beings' participation in God is closely connected with the person of Jesus Christ. "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation" (Col 1:15). Through him, by his taking part in our humanity, we were made eligible to participate in the divinity of God (Col 1:22). Through his incarnation, Christ Jesus has made it possible for us human beings the participation in the divine life of God, as St. Athanasius, the Church Father, says, "God became man so that that man might become God" (On the Incarnation 54:3). It is an initiative from God, and it is given freely to all of us. We thus participate in this by accepting this invitation of God in our faith in Jesus Christ (Jn 3:16-17; Gal 2:16, 20).

John portrays Jesus as the 'way' to the Father (Jn 14:6). It is further explained after the request of Philip to "show the Father" (Jn 14:8). Then, Jesus reveals the relationship between the Father and the Son (Jn 14:9-14). The extended explanations given by Jesus can be summed up within a single question: 'Why don't you recognize the Father dwells in me?' As the Gospel presents it, the 'type' of Fatherhood is exemplified by Christ himself in his earthly life. All those who follow him are invited to bear the image of the Father with them (Mt. 23:9).

Moreover, a priest who follows Christ radically needs to reflect God, the Father, through his words and deeds. The imagery employed by Saint Paul to convey the love of God into the reality of daily life is one of the most eloquent examples of spiritual Fatherhood the Church ever had. Saint Paul places spiritual Fatherhood above any other point in the Church: “For though you might have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers” (1 Cor. 4:15a).

St. Ignatius of Antioch is among the first to develop the iconic imagery connecting the bishop’s ministry to divine Fatherhood. On his way to martyrdom in Rome, St Ignatius advises St. Polycarp, the then Bishop of Smyrna, whom he called “as one who possesses the mind of God,” to unite, love, pray, help, heal the wounds, exhort all people to gain salvation, to pray unceasingly for all, to protect the widows and to treat the slaves with humility. The bishop should address the faithful personally, “as is the way of God Himself,” carry their infirmities on his shoulders “as a good champion of Christ ought to do.” This all-embracing love of the bishop directly references God’s unconditional love for all people.

In the celebration of the liturgy, the bishop/priest is an icon of God the Father and Christ, who is the image or the icon of the invisible God and the high-priest. The bishop/priest is the one who feeds the community with the mysteries, the body, and blood of Christ. Likewise, a pastor leads his community into the mystical life of the Church and feeds them with the sacraments and the word of God.

God invites all human beings to partake in His divinity, and He bestows the divine life freely for us. God allows us to share in His divinity; however, because of human freedom, we can determine the degree to which we could participate in it. Participation, which is not static but dynamic, always insists on being lived. Only when we live out this participatory life in the divine could we find the real or ultimate goal of this participation, perfect happiness, bliss, and joy. So, the ultimate goal of this participation in the divine nature is attaining satisfaction. Priest, being the participant of the divine nature of God, that is, the Fatherhood of God, finds this fulfillment or the ultimate goal, the joy, only when he lives out this Fatherhood in his day-to-day life, in his priestly ministry. This Fatherhood should be expressed in the vertical and horizontal dimensions of participation. Only then does he attain the joy of his life as a priest.

Revealing the Father's Heart: The Vertical and Horizontal Dimensions of Participation

The vertical dimension of participation for a priest would mean his relationship with God, the Father, that is, accepting God, the Father, like his Father. Being a priest, he must be closely related to God, the Father, at every moment of his life. The horizontal dimension of participation means, for a priest, to reveal the Fatherhood of God to fellow human beings; it is his relationship with the faithful or the fellow human beings. Pope Francis, in his apostolic letter *Patris Corde* says, "Fathers are not born, but made. A man does not become a father simply by bringing a child into the world but by taking up the responsibility to care for that child. Whenever a man accepts responsibility for the life of another, in some way, he becomes a father to that person." A priest's responsibility under his Ordination is first and foremost administering the sacraments, both vertical and horizontal. I would like to explicate it with the characteristic traits of St Joseph, which is mentioned in the papal document, *Patris Corde*.

A Beloved Father at the Baptistry. All the Christian faith venerates St Joseph as a father, a loving father. He committed himself to be the spouse of Mother Mary and the Father of Jesus. "By making his life a sacrificial service... he devoted completely to them in his life and work... his heart and all his abilities." A priest should be a beloved one, devoting oneself to the service of others with his heart. Whatever benefits a priest may render should be out of his heart, should be filled with his love; his services should be out of his love and not by force, and just to fulfill his duty or responsibility. Services rendered out of love surely make a difference in the minds of the people served. Priests are also called to exercise motherly care over the faithful.

St. Paul makes that claim, especially for those engaged in apostolic work. He writes to the Galatians: "My little children, for whom I am again in the pain of childbirth until Christ is formed in you" (Gal 4:19). Like St. Paul, a priest must present himself as a mother by working and praying for the perfection of the people entrusted to him thus, and he can undergo the pangs of motherhood afresh; he cannot be satisfied until Christ is fully formed in them. Priests are authorized under their Ordination to give birth to the children for the Church through the administration of Holy Baptism. From the baptismal font onwards, as *Presbyterorum Ordinis* declares, "priests exercise the office of Father and teacher among and for the People of God... Priests must sincerely

acknowledge and promote the dignity of the laity, willingly listening to them... Christian faithful should follow their pastors as fathers with filial love.”

A Merciful Father at the Confessional. Jesus saw the tender love of a Father in Joseph in whom the compassionate and merciful, steadfastly loving nature of God is reflected. Tenderness would mean showing mercy or being human. Tenderness would help oneself and others to heal the frailties in our life. A priest should be a father with this tender love, full of mercy and compassion. He can be a tender and loving father when he is in the confessional. A priest must form in the faithful a Christian conscience, pardon and peace. He must reach out like the Good Samaritan to wounded humanity with the healing balm of the sacrament. Pope Francis often repeats that we all are sinners, and the priests should be aware of the amount of mercy that they have received personally from God. “The man who comes to confess his sins is the same who will listen to the heart of other penitents who come to confess their sins.” So, we should also be showing mercy to others. Every priest should be the sign and instrument of the forgiveness of God, helping people to embrace and experience the love and compassion of God. In the efforts to restore the pastoral value of this sacrament, nothing is better than the priest himself making his confession.

In his advice to priests and other shepherds, Pope Francis beautifully describes the need to broaden the merciful heart for others. Priests are witnesses and ministers of the ever-increasing abundance of the Father’s mercy. As Jesus did, a priest is supposed to incarnate compassion by “doing good and healing” (Acts 10:38) in a thousand ways so that he could touch everyone. A priest can help to accustom mercy so that each person can embrace it and experience it personally. This will enable people to understand and practice mercy with creativity in ways that respect their local cultures and families. There is no joy for priests other than sharing the tender and loving God with others.

An Ordained and Obedient Father. Holy Orders make the priest the Lord’s emissary and the custodian of his mysteries. St. Joseph was ordained to take care of Mary and Jesus, the sacred treasures entrusted by God, the Father. He obeyed the will of God with utmost faithfulness. Unlike Mother Mary, the will of God was revealed to St. Joseph in his dreams, precisely four dreams. These four dreams would shed light on the four qualities of the obedience of St. Joseph. Firstly, Joseph always made an immediate response to the will of God (See

Mt 1:24). Secondly, Joseph never hesitated to obey, regardless of the hardships involved (See Mt 2:13). Thirdly, Joseph promptly obeyed the plan revealed to him (See Mt 2:21). And finally, Joseph was always ready to change even if he was prepared otherwise (See Mt. 2:22-23).

The obedience of St. Joseph should be the model of obedience for every priest. But when priests find it difficult to be obedient to their Superiors or the Bishop, it creates some undesired situations in the Church. In the liturgy of Priestly Ordination, he pledges himself to direct the local Church as a “worthy co-worker” with the bishop under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This pastoral leadership means caring for people’s souls as they move through life so that they can find their way to God, maintaining the unity of the faithful among themselves as well as with the local diocese and the universal Church.

The priests should be willing to obey the decisions of their Superiors or the Bishop as the plan of God. The Second Vatican Council Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, put obedience as a unique spiritual requirement in the life of a priest. Priests should “dedicate their own will by obedience to the service of God and their fellow men... and strive to satisfy the needs of their flocks.” At the same time, “Bishops should regard priests as their brothers and friends.” Obedience is not merely following the commands of others, but it is for a purpose – for the kingdom of God. As the sacrament of Holy Orders makes the ordained priest a sharer in the Priesthood of Christ, they should follow Christ in their obedience too. Obedience is a call through which God invites the priests to find joy in obeying Apostles’ successors. By obeying, a priest participates in Christ’s obedience who perfectly obeyed God, the Father on the cross.

An Accepting and Healing Father. Joseph healed the possible-wounded situations in the life of Mary and protected her good name, her dignity, and even her life. Accepting unconditionally would mean setting aside one’s ideas or plans and getting God’s plan in their life; moreover, taking responsibility for whatever things happen in carrying out this plan of God. Every priest should be an accepting father, respectful, and sensitive to the needs of others. Following the attitude of St Joseph, every priest should be courageous enough to welcome others, without exception, the weak, the poor, the marginalized, the needy, the discriminated, and especially those on their deathbed and provide them appropriately and sufficiently. They should be instruments to instill hope and joy in others irrespective of the difficulties involved

in this task. This should be the hallmark of every priest. Priests should help everyone to be joyful and hopeful in their life.

According to Catholic tradition, having died in the arms of Jesus and Mary, St. Joseph is also known as the Patron of a happy death. One of the important duties of a priest is comforting those who are ailing and on deathbed by the sacrament of the anointing of the Sick. This is a sacrament which by the work of the Holy Spirit and by the prayer of a priest confers upon dangerously-ill Christian health of the soul and also of the body when this is conducive to the soul's welfare. Just as St. James writes: "Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the Church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them, and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven" (Jas 5:14-15). A priest is anointed to accompany joyfully the people of God entrusted to his pastoral care from their birth to death.

A Courageous and Anointing Father. Sacrament of Confirmation is one of the initial sacraments in the Catholic Church. The newly baptized are anointed or "strengthened" in their supernatural life by this sacrament. A priest is supposed to prepare the faithful entrusted to his pastoral care to defend the faith in threatening situations, in other words, playing an apologist's role. Joseph was a man who creatively and courageously responded to the plans of God. He was prompted to carry out diverse and contrary actions in his dreams. But he was ever ready to change his plans and actions accordingly. He did not wait for God to act, but he found ways and solutions fittingly for himself. A priest should be a man like St Joseph, who was creatively courageous. At times, we wait for God to act, to find our solutions to our difficulties. We put the burden upon God, hesitant to own the responsibility of our decisions. The courage of St Joseph teaches us to be creative and find solutions by ourselves, trusting in the providence of God. It may at times result in turning a problem into a possibility. A priest should be courageous enough to take decisions about the faithful entrusted to his care, relying upon the providence of God that it would result for their welfare and not for harm. We may find it challenging to understand the plans of God, but it is good that we remember that God is a God of surprises and his ways are mysterious.

The walk to Christian holiness is a process of growth to maturity towards a perfect human. As a Christian grows in this maturity with the

help of the Spirit, they will manifest the various fruits of the Spirit (see Gal 5:22). The priests must be able to taste the joy of the resurrection of Christ and bear witness to the world that Jesus is the Lord.

A Sacrificing Father at the Altar. Eucharist is a sacrament of Christ's sacrifice on the cross. It is not merely a ritual celebration alone but demands a life appropriate to the Crucified One. It is not enough for a priest to celebrate the Eucharistic sacrifice. He must live it. As a hardworking person, St. Joseph cooperated with God. As the breadwinner of the Holy Family, Joseph abandoned his pleasures and participated in the divine plan. Thus, he became broken bread that symbolizes the Body of Christ sacrificed for us on the cross. For a Priest, sacrifice means to be committed in his priestly ministry. Through his sacramental sacrifice of salvation to the Father, the priest lends his intelligence, will, voice, and hands to Christ. He must lay down his entire life as a sacrifice on the Altar. So, for no reason, the priest should look to himself and strive for the well-being of the people trusting God and loving them. The priest should be rooted firmly in the Lord, open and available at all times to others, brothers and sisters. The life and ministry of a priest are bound with the "pastoral charity," in other words, the shepherd's love for his flock. "This pastoral charity flows out extraordinarily from the Eucharistic sacrifice. This stands as the root and center of the whole life of a priest.

The joy priest finds in his sacrificial life is participating at God's table as his children. Thus a priest enjoys the enduring, blessing-rich, healing presence of God among his people. The sacrificial character of the Eucharist challenges a priest's life and leads to a Eucharistic spirituality of self-surrender. This spirituality can give the strength to love daily life with Jesus Christ for the glory of God. In the Syro-Malabar liturgy, there is a Syriac expression, *Galiyūs appē*, which means 'cheerful face' which is recited by the celebrant before second Lord's Prayer: "Enable us to stand in your presence with a cheerful face (*Galiyūs appē*) and pure hearts." This was already known to biblical wisdom: "The sign of a happy heart is a cheerful face" (Sir 13:26). The priest experiences Christian joy in the celebration of the Altar.

A Father for Family Ties. The Christian marriage has supernatural elements attached to it. The baptized man and woman who contract matrimony beget children for the Kingdom of God. They train them in natural learning and goodness and supernatural faith and wisdom. They develop their personalities naturally and supernaturally since the

graces of the sacrament help them attain the beatific vision. Joseph acted as a father to Jesus, a foster father, for his whole life. He took the responsibility to protect Mary and Jesus, nurture him, and provide everything for his maturity. It has been beautifully explained in the Gospel: “The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him” (Lk 2:40). A priest should also, following the example of St Joseph, be foster fathers to the many orphans in our society and those children who lack fatherly care and protection.

Pope Francis says, “Joseph was the earthly shadow of the Heavenly Father.” He further explains that “Being a father entails introducing children to life and reality, not being over-protective or possessive, but rather making them capable of deciding for themselves, enjoying the freedom and exploring new possibilities.” After the example of St Joseph, every priest should have non-possessive love for his place and people. This attitude grants them greater freedom and total availability in their ministerial commitments. Priests have a special obligation to pay attention to youth, married people, and parents. A pastor’s care must be towards forming a genuine Christian community.

In a nutshell, by following these characteristic traits of St Joseph, a priest can be a sacrament, a living sign, and an instrument of the Fatherhood of God. And it is by fulfilling all these nuances a priest accomplishes the vertical and horizontal dimension of his participation in the Divine nature of God.

Psycho-Spiritual Supplements for a Joyful Participation

Participation in the divine Fatherhood and St. Joseph’s horizontal and vertical involvement in the Fatherhood gives us the right insights for a joyful priesthood. However, the life of a priest is beyond all its theoretical explanations. The struggles and challenges through which he is undergone are immense. In the Letter of St. Paul to Romans, “I do not understand my actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate” (Rom 7:15). The impeccability of a priest is an exaggeration today. The priest is not immune to psychological problems and is impervious to mundane human struggles. So the question is: How should they be supported psycho-spiritually in their ongoing formation to make their life more joyful? The following practical ways may shed light to keep the priest joyful throughout his ongoing formation.

A Unique Relationship with God. Priests are suffering from a significant identity crisis: “Priests are no different from anyone else.”

This kind of undifferentiated identity comes out of their lack of self-confidence. First of all, priests need awareness that they are Christ's choice, though there are flaws in them. Jesus offered to them (Apostles) a kind of intimate friendship that he did not offer to others. The priest is supposed to be a part of an "inner circle," or a kind of "friend of God." So, he has unique access to God for his people, and as such, he becomes the official representative of God. Self-surrender is the price of friendship with God.

Rossetti (2009), an American Catholic priest and psychologist, surveyed the happiness level of priests and confirmed that priests' relationship to God helps them above all have their sense of mental health and well-being. This survey result shows that a priest's relationship to God strengthens him from the disorders of somatization, depression, and anxiety. Thus his mental health, in general, tends to be better. He is less likely to be burned out due to his more significant sense of personal accomplishment, lower level of emotional exhaustion, and depersonalization. This is, of course, a happy finding that 'priests are happy.' The factors contributing to this happiness are close friendship with God, Marian's devotion, spiritual reading, daily Eucharistic celebration, the sacrament of Reconciliation, canonical and private prayers, etc. Priests are the persons finding the buried treasure. The scriptures note that he did so with "joy" (Mt 13:44). This "joy" helps a priest go beyond his pains and sufferings. The priest must be reminded of, as we read in the book of Nehemiah, "the joy of the Lord is your strength" (Neh. 8:10). It is adequate for priests to focus on God instead of their fears and anxieties, and they can help others learn about the joy they have.

Ongoing Spiritual Direction. "Ongoing formation" reminds us that the experience of discipleship is not ceasing to exist with the seminary life of a priest. It continues under the action of the Holy Spirit, within a process of gradual and continuous configuration to Jesus Christ, in his being and his acting. In this process, ongoing spiritual direction is a great help to those in religious life, ministry, and other professions where one has to make decisions affecting many lives regularly. Even ordinary confession should involve some spiritual direction. Unfortunately, many busy priests have come to forget or neglect this obligation. Priests have to undergo the roles of both a spiritual director and directee. The spiritual director in primitive times was much more than the present name implies. He was a spiritual father who 'begot'

the perfect life in his disciple's soul by his instructions, by his prayer, his sanctity, and his example.

Happiness in the priestly/religious life depends on wise direction, especially during formation. The ideal would be for everyone to have a father to whom they could go for regular direction. Thomas Merton, a famous Benedictine Monk of the twentieth century, highlights three basic attitudes a directee should have. The first is gratitude that the one can receive this ministry. Gratitude keeps one attentive to the graces and blessings God provides through the process. The directee needs to be thankful for even a simple, insightful thought. Another attitude is realism. It requires him to avoid unrealistic expectations that a director can perform a wonder in his life. A directee must be realistic enough to know that there is no perfect spiritual director and that formation is gradual. The third attitude Merton highlights are humility. He notes that some directees are looking for flattery and approval. Only those with the virtue of humility can genuinely participate in the process of spiritual direction.

Louf, a Benedictine Monk and the abbot of Mont-des-Cats in France, connects the insights from the human sciences like psychology for the benefits of the spiritual direction. In his famous work, *Grace Can Do More*, he admits that no one today can do spiritual path ignorant of psychology. He has used contemporary depth psychology in his spiritual direction methods. Like Merton, he also admits that humility is required most from the directee. Directees bravely and humbly make themselves more transparent by manifesting their thoughts, desires, and actions, some of which may be taboo. Directors are to listen in love without judging, in such a way that directees feel true acceptance and safety. Such acceptance breeds trust, which allows directees to deepen their self-revelation and widen their self-concept as they discover they no longer need to hide parts of themselves. This transparency fosters the birth and flourishing of the true self. In his autobiography, *Mystical Journey*, William Johnston SJ, a significant writer of contemporary spirituality, says that his vocation was rooted in his true self, and he considered that it is relevant to "search for the true self rather than on obedience to the rules." He further says:

People could be encouraged to find their true self by emptiness or detachment or prayer by letting go of clinging to created things. This is the way of Meister Eckhart and the mystics. It is the nada (nothing) of St. John of the Cross. It is the way of Zen. It is the way of the Gospel.

Would not this be more human than obliging people to use the words of the catechism and excommunicate them if they fail to do so?

Louf says that we need a shift from living out of the superficial self to living out of the deep self. A priest/religious should overcome self-will through obedience. Overcoming self-will means not denying the self but letting go of sin and superficiality, which keep us residing on the surface. The birth of the true self is birth into love and freedom. A priest who regularly undergoes spiritual direction could find his true self and live out the deep self, and he will be the most joyful man in his life and ministry.

Intimate Communion of Relationships. Relationships are the most significant source of joy. Priests are often seen as the ones caught up in the joys of fellowship within a community of faith. Friendly interactions occur in the community, workplace, and every aspect of life. These interactions nurture a need ranging from simple recognition to intimacy. “The intimate encounter can occur across gender, generation, status, class and education, and among persons of great diversity and experience. It is a spiritual encounter transcending all barriers, but inherently founded on trust.” Mostly a priest comes across a trio of relationships connected with his ministry, namely, bishop, presbyters, and the people of God entrusted in his pastoral care. If he could have a harmonious relationship with these three groups, it would be a horizontal supplement for his joyful priestly life.

The relationship between priests and their bishop is an important one. A bishop must be a father and brother to his priests. Both roles together make the relationship effective and friendly. In this fraternal setting, the virtue of obedience to one’s bishop is more inviting. Priests have to consider this obedience to their authorities as a promise or vow an important value because it is strongly connected with their happiness. Priesthood is a life of humble service. If he focuses more on himself, a kind of clerical narcissism will creep into his life, and he could not give himself entirely to the Church and the people.

Under the Holy Orders, a priest is brought into the *ordo presbyterorum*, which comprises a unity and can be understood as a genuine family. The fraternity among priests is a privileged space where the priest can find help in overcoming human limitations and weaknesses. The recent document published by the Congregation for the Clergy on the “Priesthood” calls this fraternity the sacramental fraternity. It further says,

Priestly perfection... cannot be achieved in isolation since priests form one presbyterate whose unity is made up of special bonds of apostolic charity, ministry, and brotherhood. Thus, the intimate sacramental fraternity of priests is the first manifestation of charity and the first place in which it can grow. All this can be achieved by the help of the Holy Spirit, and not without a personal spiritual struggle, to purify oneself of all forms of individualism.

As Pope John Paul II says, “the grace of Holy Orders... takes up and elevates the human and psychological bonds of affection and friendship, as well as the spiritual bonds which exist between priests.” Priests have to see in others their brothers rather than rivals. Jealousy among priests will be an anti-witnessing. It would be better to highlight the good and beautiful things their brothers do and learn to take joy in them. Priests who have good friends are much more likely to be happier priests.

A priest’s friendship need not be restricted among fellow priests; moreover, they can have a good rapport with the people of God who are entrusted with his pastoral care. “He may not remain emotionally and spiritually isolated from them.” The separation from the people of God will weaken their ministry and their own psychological and spiritual health. Priests have to live out their vocation by being among the people. Priests are God’s unique “letters of recommendation” to humanity (2 Cor. 3:1-3). People could read these letters of God written in the hearts of priests evidently through their life of sanctity. It is not the praise of others that motivates the priests to live a spiritual life, but a desire to honor their Lord through the life they live so that they may become a sweet aroma to those saved by grace through faith in faith Christ.

Conclusion

God calls every Christian to participate in His divine life unconditionally. But it is left for every one of us, to what extent we partake in it. A priest has a special call, a call to be a father. His participation in the Divine life is to disclose the Fatherhood of God not only to the faithful alone but also to all human beings indiscriminately. The ultimate goal of this participation is eternal joy, which is fulfilled only through accomplishing the vertical and horizontal dimensions of his involvement in the divine nature. We need priests today with Father’s Heart, both in the Church and society. “Ite ad Joseph!” is another expression showing a father’s generous heart, traditionally attributed to St. Joseph. “Go to Joseph!”

were the words of Pharaoh to the people of Egypt during the years of famine (Gen. 41:55). During the Covid-19 pandemic, Church implores the help of St Joseph to find ways to overcome all the hurdles and hardships of life. If a priest could inculcate the characteristic traits of St Joseph, then he finds the fulfillment of the divine participation, the eternal bliss or joy. A Priest with a father's heart finds his Priesthood joyful.

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