

First, an excerpt from Pope Benedict's Epiphany homily:

"Let us then ask ourselves: why do some see and seek, and others don't? What opens their eyes and heart? What's lacking in those who remain indifferent, those who point out the road but don't themselves move along it? We can respond: too much confidence in oneself, the pretense of knowing reality perfectly, the presumption of having already figured out a definitive judgment on things render one's heart closed and unreachable to the newness of God...

In the end, what is lacking in us is authentic humility, which knows to place oneself beneath that which is greater, but also authentic courage, which brings us to believe in that which is truly great, even if it's manifested in a defenseless child. Lacking is the evangelical ability to be childlike in our hearts, to be awed, to let go of oneself so to follow down the path signed by the star, the road of God. The Lord, however, has the power to make us able to see and, thus, to save us. Let us want, then, to ask Him to give us a wise and innocent heart, one which allows us to see the star of his mercy, to walk along its way, to find it and to be filled with the great light and true joy that he has brought into this world. Amen!"

**Grateful to Rocco Palmo, from the "[Whispers in the Loggia](http://whispersintheloggia.blogspot.com/)" blog for directing us all to the above quotation. Please support his work by clicking on the above or by going to:
<http://whispersintheloggia.blogspot.com/>**

And today, as we conclude the Christmas Season, may you hear God speaking to you in the depths of your heart:

"You are my beloved child. I delight in you."

The following article appeared in The Tablet and was written by Timothy Radcliffe.

Towards a humble Church: Dublin Diocese and child abuse

... Friendship with Jesus – intimacy – means learning to be gentle and lowly of heart. Then we shall find rest for our souls. But if one thinks of the Catholic Church, the first word that springs to mind might not be "humble".

I have given retreats for dioceses in 15 countries since I finished my term as Master of the Dominican Order in 2001. The vast majority of priests and bishops whom I have met are simple and unpretentious people who just wish to serve the people of God. But this personal humility has to be sustained in the teeth of a clerical culture, common to all Christian denominations, which stresses rank and power.

This terrible crisis of sexual abuse is deeply linked to the way that power can corrupt human relationships, which is why it touches all the Churches, even if the Catholic Church happens to have been more in the spotlight recently. Celibacy is not, I believe, the source of the crisis, otherwise it would be the case that Catholic priests have a higher rate of offence, which, it seems, we do not. We shall only really address this crisis if we learn from Jesus who is “gentle and lowly of heart”, and find ways of embodying authority which honour the equal dignity of all the baptised, and cherish the weak and vulnerable. Careful vetting of candidates for the priesthood and child-safety procedures are necessary, but they will not get to the root of the problem.

Every institution always seeks to preserve and augment its power, but the philosopher Charles Taylor, in *A Secular Age*, has traced the genesis of “a culture of control” from the seventeenth century onwards. Society is seen as a mechanism rather than an organism, which needs to be adjusted and manipulated. ... From the Roman Empire at the time of its birth until the Communist empires of the twentieth century, the Church has fought to keep hold of its own life, and often ended up by mirroring what it opposed.

We will not have a Church which is safe for the young until we learn from Christ and become again a humble Church in which we are all equal children of the one Father and authority is never oppressive.

At the end of the Middle Ages, the priesthood was in crisis. It was unable to respond to the challenges of a new world of widespread literacy. The parish clergy were poorly educated, sometimes barely able to celebrate the Mass, often living with concubines. The response to this crisis led to an extraordinary renewal of the priesthood, with a new spirituality, new seminaries, a more profound theological formation, a new strict discipline. Without this, the Church would have found it hard to survive the rise of Protestantism.

But this Tridentine understanding of priesthood is in its turn showing signs of crisis, of which the sexual abuse scandal is just a symptom. Its stiff clericalism and authoritarianism, unsurprising perhaps in the context of our past battles, do not help the Church now to thrive and be a sign of God’s friendship for humanity. And so we need a new culture of authority, from the Vatican to the parish council, which lifts people up into the mystery of loving equality, which is the life of the Trinity.

... So if we face this terrible crisis of sexual abuse with courage and faith, then it may precipitate a profound renewal of the Church. We can discover Jesus’ commandments not as a heavy burden which crushes people but as the invitation to his friendship. We can be liberated from harmful ways of using power in the Church, which are ultimately rooted in secularism, and become more like the Christ who was lowly and humble of heart, and we shall find rest for our souls.

The following article by David Rubino appeared in *America* magazine. Msgr. Rubino is senior vice provost at Lake Erie College of Osteopathic Medicine, Erie, PA.

Fraternal Orders

Good counsel for young clergy from their senior brothers

They stand erect, these silent memorials to past servants. Some gather dust, while others glisten in the bright morning sun. On close inspection, handprints are visible in the rubber molding of the walkers and scratches from collisions with the walls of the Bishop Michael J. Murphy Residence for Retired Priests in Erie, Pa. Forged from aluminum and rubber, these artifacts are the leftover wheelchairs, walkers, canes and electric scooters of retired members of the clergy who have died.

Seeing these castoffs in the basement, I wondered what advice these veterans might have offered the young men who now serve in their place. So I gathered from among their retired brothers here a modest amount of “advice for young clergy” in a quarrelsome church.

Six Suggestions

1. *Be yourself.* Ready to explode as he struggles to set up voice mail, a gentle cleric nearing the point of cellphone rage advises, “Forget everything they taught you in the seminary. Those chaps never lived a day in a parish or had to struggle to make a payroll. What do they know about asphalt roofs, boilers and helping families when Dad is out of work?”

Clearly, seminary teaching has evolved from lectures and note-taking to better teaching and learning experiences coupled with assessment. But however improved the teaching process may be, the newly ordained remain just that: newly ordained. As with new university faculty members, newly ordained clergy arrive at their job assignment without experiential understanding of the dynamics of a full-time job and without a tested view of how they are perceived as priests by others. Newly ordained are new to the job of priest; they are unseasoned transformational agents of the church.

When a man’s role changes from that of transitional deacon to priest, the perceptions of the people shift dramatically. They see him as moving from student to leader. Seminaries may teach about this perceptual shift, but the role change must be experienced to be understood.

In a family business, for example, the most dangerous transition is the transfer from the founding parent to the inheriting children. Even when the children know the business, the expectations of employees and outsiders rise significantly once the founder’s children assume the mantle of leadership. Often they fail. Many second-generation executives fail because they try to do too much too quickly in order to prove themselves. They try to define themselves by outdoing their parents rather than doing what is expected of them.

The advice here is to be yourself. Observe before you act. Listen before you speak. Let the reality of the priesthood permeate the fabric of your being as you adjust to the complicated role of priest. Learn the history of wherever you are planted. Disregard some of the minutiae you were taught in the protective tower of the seminary, where life was more structured.

Your parishioners are good teachers, having seen priests come and go over the years. And many of these good people will be in the parish long after you have left it. Learn from them and with them. Let them see your real flesh. Otherwise, your efforts to prove yourself rather than be yourself may obliterate the “real you” from your priesthood.

2. *Practice sacrificing self.* “Welcome home. I’ll take care of it,” was the standard greeting of the concierge at the retirement residence, himself a retired priest, to every new resident upon arrival. Most likely he was just trying to eradicate the memories of the greetings he received on his first assignment. Ordained over five decades before, this priest still nervously recalled a scowling pastor’s fraternal salutation: “I told the bishop I didn’t want to feed a resident guy. I wanted a full-time guy that works for food and me. Your room’s up the stairs to the right.” The welcome wagon must have been in the shop that day.

The unsolicited advice in this case is to practice becoming a better person and a better priest by sacrificing your self, as well as those petty things attached to your self-definition. Priestly ministry demands it. As a young priest the concierge at the retirement home prayed for the angel of death to visit the pastor quickly. But he also learned to surrender himself to work with the pastor, balancing his own needs against the pastor’s for the good of the parishioners. This priest learned how to serve others, not self—how to be gracious and hospitable and kind. He might have become bitter. Instead, he learned well a lesson that has framed his priestly life to this day.

3. *Be easy on the folks.* A spicy lasagna dinner in the retirement home sprinkled with a spicy agenda of discussion topics forced one priest to look for Roloids. The debate had heated up: What happened to mortal sin, Teddy Roosevelt and Monsignor’s political philosophy? Maybe he was “a better Democrat than he was a Catholic.” Calmer after dinner, this priest advised his juniors: “Know you are naïve. Do no harm. The young guys are on a sacramental quest to root out mortal sin. Be easy on the folks.”

It is not a sin to be naïve. The sooner young clergy realize they will never know it all (which is perfectly acceptable), the better off they will be. The clerical quest to be the next pastor or vicar of whatever office the chancery needs to reorganize can wait at least one year.

The unsolicited advice: Smile and take it easy. People should not be harshly judged. Tenderly wait on your people and be present to them. The signs of these times indicate that a fundamental change is taking place in American civic and religious life. The elderly are frightened; Generations X and Y seem to have little comprehension of civic engagement and social connectedness (other than the virtual community). Mix urbanism with a secular age that is part of our conscious fabric (as Charles Taylor reminds us), and we become a confused people and a church struggling to find our way in a radically different time.

So be easy on the folks. Learn with them about the contemporary age with its diversity of people, ideas and choices. As you offer them the Eucharist, gaze at their receptive hands—weathered, soiled and swollen, painfully arthritic, yet present to receive the Lord. Smile and be easy. They need a pastor, not a judge. Walk with them and search with them. Support and guide them.

4. *Speak with many tongues.* This priest, known as Reverend Doctor, never really spoke much. Having spent most of his ministry as a teacher, he was concerned about clear communication with the new generation: “They are good kids but brazen. Not like before. Not shy about speaking their minds. I would never have spoken out to my teachers when I was their age.”

Adding to the communications confusion of this new generation is the curtain call of the children of the World War II vets and Rosie the Riveter—the baby boomers. They are leaving the stage costumed as the wicked establishment they once deplored, leaving behind a colorful world of choices. They are leaving their legacy and what is left of their money to a new generation, called the millennials.

This group is smaller than the boomers and has been overshadowed by them. For the millennials, technology rules every phase of their lives. They settle down later in life because of hectic work schedules, are a generation of tinkerers concerning religion and reach out to whatever/whoever welcomes them on their terms.

Who will form the millennials in the faith? Who will speak to them in the language they use, employing their patterns of thought? Who will speak to the exiting boomers and the rest of the population?

The unsolicited advice is to speak in many tongues as you proclaim the Gospel. Proclaim a Gospel that is understandable to generations raised and formed by immigrant parents as well as by technology. Be knowledgeable about the diversity of people and the communication patterns they use. Learn to use the communication tools of the age. The choice to ignore the impact of diversity, communication patterns and communication tools will lessen your ability to preach the Gospel.

5. *Laugh with your elders, not at them.* A happily retired priest poignantly opined: “The new guys give us no respect as priests of Vatican II. They think we led the church astray, and they will never forgive us for it.”

There have been many changes since the 1960s. Many retired priests led the local changes and felt the pain of those changes. In worship, parish governance and church renovation, these men struggled with angry parishioners to open the windows and share responsibility with all God’s people.

As a direct result, the senior members of the priesthood now feel distanced from their junior colleagues. Convinced that Vatican II bettered the church, they hope the younger clergy will hold them in respect and admiration. But confusion and feelings of rejection cloud the senior clergy’s interactions with young priests.

The unsolicited advice here is to respect the elder clergy, because they deserve it. They have much to teach, for history and experiences are master-teachers. Laughing with them, rather than at them is not a high price to pay. It is what it costs to share time with men who have given a life of service to the Lord. It is as advisable as it is virtuous.

6. *Dance with your failures.* Learn from failures on both a cognitive and a spiritual level. Think about your failures, then forget them. Do they spring from poor planning, tight timelines in the schedule, too much trust in a core of power-hungry volunteers or simply

from bad ideas? Learning from failed experiences can teach a person how to juggle the complex interactions of personalities that are part of leadership in ministry. These can also teach the proper ordering of ministry's myriad tasks.

Do your failures have their roots in personal disasters? Did you run off the priestly path because you lost your way, were blinded by pride or were plain stubborn and stupid? Did you fail because you viewed yourself as more important than anyone or anything else? Did the satisfaction of erecting your edifice distract you from looking into the unfocused eyes of grieving spouses or holding hands with lonely children? Did loneliness seek a temporary companion in alcohol or drugs acquired over the Internet? It helps to learn from failures by facing them with a spiritual guide. In guided dialogue we learn we are not alone. We are disciples on the road. We fall, get up, walk on and serve.

In *The Holy Longing: The Search for a Christian Spirituality*, Ronald Rolheiser writes of a "dark memory," a myth that "before birth, each soul is kissed by God and proceeds through life recalling in some dark way that kiss, and measuring everything in relation to that original sweetness." God has kissed you and the people in your ministry with a sweet kiss. When they fail at balancing jobs, family and limited incomes, caring for elderly parents and their own family needs, they search for that original, tranquil kiss of the Lord.

Minister to that sweet kiss as you find it within yourself, and you will not only serve your people. You will bond with them through sharing your search, which is the deepest part of yourself. At that point your journey will intersect with the journey of your people, and you will both discover the peaceful tranquility of that sweet elusive kiss of the Lord. And you will dance through life together with the Lord, because God's people will know the deepest part of you—with the help of a little unsolicited advice from your senior brothers in ministry. *Ad multos annos.*

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Personally, my concern with many of the "younger" clergy is not that they have little respect for the older members of the clergy. It is that many of them have entered the ministry with little or no background in philosophy. They enter theological studies without the requisite skills in critical thinking and dialogue. They accept church teaching (all of it) as absolute. They do not engage in a conversation with theology.

Please send your comments and recommended articles to tony@tonyercolano.com.