

The Gift of Priests

We have some wonderful priests in this state, don't we?

I was thinking about that yesterday while sitting at a table with one of our parish priests. The gathering was in thanksgiving for those lay people who have served on a Diocesan board. It was a time to get together, enjoy a meal, and give thanks. My thoughts of thanks shifted to the priests.

The priest at our table is engaging, has a great sense of humor and exhibits a joy of life that reflects all the good a priest can be. As I contemplated those gifts I thought of how blessed I have been these past several years because I have been given the opportunity to meet so many of the priests from Ekalaka to Eureka. We have worked together on some very tough issues and I certainly have a much greater appreciation of how difficult their job can be at times.

We, the laity, often have expectations of our priests that are impossible to achieve. They must be personal, pastoral, good with finances (including finding the money to run the parish without asking us for any more). They need to be great homilists every week, as well as attend every gathering of the various councils, choirs, youth and adult education sessions. They need to be there when we grieve and there when we struggle with church teaching. They need to agree with us on how we approach issues in the Church and in public policy. Some of us want them to speak out more on some issues, and less on others. Others of us want the exact opposite. On some issues our priests cannot win. And yet, with all those expectations, more often than not, our priests have the wisdom and ability to rise above the fray. Through their commitment to us and to the Church they lead us through the difficult, confusing times.

Our priests are human like us, and humans don't always agree. My wife reminds me of that fact occasionally. What I have discovered is that quite often we are much too critical of our priests for doing a job as well as could be expected, that we may not have been able to do at all. For that alone they are amazing men.

It is the Year of the Priests. Let us make a special commitment to appreciate the good our priests do for us, and are for us. Let us make a commitment to pray for them and support them in their ministry. And in this Holy Season of Christmas, a season of gift giving, we should give special thanks for the gift of our priests, and our Bishops. How lucky we are that they are with us, leading us, and inviting us to community at the table of the Lord.