

This week is my 25th anniversary as a priest, and I'd like to thank everyone who helped me mark this milestone with my family and friends.

There are two common spiritual questions that are especially important for priests. One of them I remember from my grade school catechism: Why did God make me? The catechism answered, "God made me to know him, to love him and to serve him in this life and to be happy with him in the next." But every human being asks more specifically, "Why did God make *me*?" God made billions of people, so what did God have in mind by making me? To a priest, this is the question of religious vocation.

When I reflected on this, I realized I could have done some other things with the gifts I received in my life, but I truly believed that priesthood was why God made me. Each one of us will feel most at peace with life if we do what God made us to do.

The second spiritual question is one asked in the bible by St. Paul. In his early life, he persecuted Christians, but on his way to Damascus a blinding light threw him to the ground and he looked up unable to see who or what had stopped him with such force. The first words he spoke at the moment of his conversion were these: "Who are you?" Paul needed to know who was stronger and more mysterious than any other force he had encountered.

When we turn to God in times of trial and ask, "Who are you?" it isn't a question of disbelief. It's a question of profound belief. We believe in someone stronger and more mysterious than we are, but a force we can never know completely. This question helps us learn more about who God is, what God tolerates, and how God loves. The priest, who leads our prayers at the eucharist, becomes the focus of our desires to know who God is and why God acts in certain ways in our life.

For this reason, of all the things a priest does, his most important task is to spend time in the mysterious presence of God. We never get it all figured out, but we aim to feel at home within the paradox of faith.

Throughout this Easter season we've heard readings from the Book of Revelation, and today we bring that series to a close. In the last chapter of the book, John sees the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. It gleamed with the splendor of God. It had a massive, high wall, with twelve gates where twelve angels were stationed. John says, "I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God almighty and the Lamb." We need churches and temples as special places where we meet God, but in the heavenly Jerusalem, John says there is no need for a special place because the presence of God pervades the entire city.

That is the city where a priest has to dwell. I've spent 25 years exploring the holy city of God, but it will take 25,000 years more. When you

and I face the questions of life, we yearn for answers, but with the questions we are already in the presence of the mystery of God.