

## 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time

This past week Bishop Johnston met with the priests of the diocese for our annual gathering in Camdenton. We use this time to build our fraternity and our skills to serve you better. One topic was helping other people hear the call to serve the Church through religious vocations. Many people discern a vocation to family life, in which they experience the love of Christ in their affection for their spouse and children. Others are called to serve as a priest, a deacon, a brother or a sister in religious life.

Our presenter urged us to get back in touch with the way we priests each heard God's call and to celebrate the joy of our ministry. A good many of us like me heard the call to priesthood when we were very young, but others discerned it later in their lives. Many men enter the seminary only after years of thinking it over; I'm a little unusual in that regard because my vocation seemed clear to me from the beginning. I've enjoyed every day of priesthood—visiting with people at some of the most important times of their lives and forging strong friendships with other priests who experience the same joys and challenges of the ministry.

As it happens, today—as last Sunday—our second reading concerns the high priest of the Old Testament. For several weeks this fall we're hearing excerpts from the Letter to the Hebrews. It's such a long, dense epistle that the lectionary breaks it up across two separate years of its cycle of readings. We continue hearing from it for several more weeks and then put it aside until next summer when we'll hear the conclusion. Its author is unknown, but the Letter makes an appeal to a Hebrew audience by citing a number of Old Testament passages and showing how the coming of Christ sets them in a new light.

Today's passage quotes verses from two of the psalms: "You are my son: this day I have begotten you," and "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." The writer categorizes both verses as foreshadowings of Christ. Jesus is the Son of God, and he reigns in the heavens as the great high priest. Melchizedek himself appears briefly in the Book of Genesis as a priest and king who offered a sacrifice of bread and wine. He entered from nowhere and disappears into nothingness, so even his mysterious presence foreshadows something unworldly about Christ.

Every Catholic priest shares in some way in the priesthood of Christ. So the points that the Letter to the Hebrews makes about the high priesthood of old has some application to parish priests today. It says, "Every high priest is taken from among men and made their representative before God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He is able to deal patiently with the ignorant and erring, for he himself is beset by weakness and so, for this reason, must make sin offerings for himself as well as for the people. No one takes this honor upon himself but only when called by God." Sometimes our weaknesses get the better of us, but they're supposed to help us serve you better.

The topic of religious vocations opens some pretty big questions: Who am I? Who made me? Why did God make me? Why did God make me the way I am—with these gifts and these faults? How am I supposed to live my life? Once we figure that out, it will bring unending happiness to us and eternal glory to God.