

FROM HERO TO SERVANT TO MYSTIC



# From Hero to Servant to Mystic

*Navigating the Deeper Waters  
of Priestly Spirituality*

Scott P. Detisch



LITURGICAL PRESS  
Collegeville, Minnesota

[www.litpress.org](http://www.litpress.org)

Cover design by Amy Marc. Photo courtesy of Getty Images.

Scripture quotations are from New Revised Standard Version Bible: Catholic Edition © 1989, 1993 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Excerpts of Psalms from the English translation of *The Liturgy of the Hours* © 1974, International Commission on English in the Liturgy Corporation (ICEL); excerpts from the English translation of *Rites of Ordination of a Bishop, of Priests, and of Deacons* © 2000, 2002, ICEL. All rights reserved.

Excerpts from documents of the Second Vatican Council are from *Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations; The Basic Sixteen Documents*, edited by Austin Flannery, OP, © 1996. Used with permission of Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota.

David Whyte, “The TrueLove,” in *The House of Belonging* © Many Rivers Press, Langley, WA USA.

© 2019 by Order of Saint Benedict, Collegeville, Minnesota. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever, except brief quotations in reviews, without written permission of Liturgical Press, Saint John’s Abbey, PO Box 7500, Collegeville, MN 56321-7500. Printed in the United States of America.

1            2            3            4            5            6            7            8            9

---

### **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Names: Detisch, Scott P., author.

Title: From hero to servant to mystic : navigating the deeper waters of priestly spirituality / Scott P. Detisch.

Description: Collegeville, Minnesota : Liturgical Press, 2019.

Identifiers: LCCN 2018030988 (print) | LCCN 2018051151 (ebook) | ISBN 9780814644935 (ebook) | ISBN 9780814644706

Subjects: LCSH: Detisch, Scott P. | Priests—Religious life. | Spiritual formation—Catholic Church. | Catholic Church—Clergy—Biography.

Classification: LCC BX4705.D4648 (ebook) | LCC BX4705.D4648 A3 2019 (print) | DDC 248.8/92—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2018030988>

This book is dedicated  
to the memory of  
Arthur and Jeanette Detisch,  
whose love has been the fount from which  
the Water of Life has flowed for me.

This book is written in tribute to  
the priests of the Diocese of Erie, PA,  
who have been Heroes, Servants, and Mystics  
for me.



# Contents

Acknowledgments ix

Introduction 1

## *Chapter One*

A Noble Hero *for* Christ 15

## *Chapter Two*

A Faithful Servant *with* Christ 47

## *Chapter Three*

A Humble Mystic *in* Christ *in* Me 77

## *Chapter Four*

The Archetypes in the “Ark-of-Types” 105

## *Chapter Five*

The Archetypes in Initial and Ongoing Priestly Formation 123

## *Epilogue*

The River Always Beckons 147



# Acknowledgments

My own spiritual journey as a priest began with the inspiration I received from the incredible models of authentic and fulfilling priesthood I encountered before and after ordination, especially in my home diocese of Erie, Pennsylvania. I have watched these priests with admiration; I have been taught and mentored by them, ministered alongside them, prayed with them, and enjoyed friendships with many of them. These priests have been amazing heroes, dedicated servants, and powerful mystics in the church and in my life. To all of them I offer this “spiritual biography” of priesthood as an act of thanksgiving. They are the ones who initially and continually helped me “put out into the deep water” and cultivated in me a desire to be a good pastoral minister for God’s People.

The recognition that being an effective pastoral minister has to be paired with being a deeply spiritual person was firmly implanted in me through the initial priestly formation, theological education, and pastoral training I received at Christ the King Seminary in East Aurora, New York. The Franciscans of the Holy Name Province who oversaw the seminary at that time, the priests of the Diocese of Buffalo who helped to staff it, the religious women and laypersons who were key members of the faculty all had a deep and lasting impression on my continued development as a human being and on my continued formation as a priest. I am equally grateful to the amazing spiritual directors, mentors, and retreat directors who have guided me in keeping priestly ministry tethered to the inner life, especially Sr. Joan Wagner, SSJ, Fr. Peter Drilling, Fr. Rick Reina, Fr. Daniel McLellan, OFM, Sr. Maria McCoy, CSJ, and Fr. Jerome Simmons. These wise persons taught me how to pray, how to ponder, and how to hold the vicissitudes of life in redemptive contact with the Indwelling of God. My hope is that what I offer in this book is a fitting reflection of the deep wisdom and spiritual insight that each of them shared with me.

The motivation to write this book has come not only from my own struggles to grow in the spiritual life and priestly ministry, when I had to surrender (sometimes painfully) into a whole new level of archetypal energy, but also from my years as a faculty member in priestly formation work. I am indebted to the colleagues with whom I served at Christ the King Seminary (East Aurora, New York) and St. Mary's Seminary (Baltimore, Maryland). I am very appreciative of the enduring support, collegiality, and encouragement I have received from the faculty and administration at St. Mary Seminary (Wycliffe, Ohio), with whom I am privileged to serve once again. From my co-workers in seminary ministry I have gained great insight into the interplay between spiritual and human formation.

The seminarians as well have also inspired me because they are often so genuinely eager to grow in spiritual maturity and to become truly holy men. Many of the men in priestly formation with whom I have worked have radiated a deep spiritual hunger and a pastoral zeal. To accompany them in their priestly formation has been one of the greatest privileges in my years as a priest. I am very grateful to God for what these men are now doing and will continue to do for the church.

My own service as the pastor at Holy Cross Church in Fairview, Pennsylvania, was a time of great learning for me that brought together in a more cohesive manner the human, intellectual, pastoral, and spiritual formation that had been continuing in my priesthood for many years. That learning and integration of all the aspects of priestly life and ministry now continues for me with the wonderful parish of St. John the Evangelist in Girard, Pennsylvania. The people of these two parishes comprise dynamic communities of faith, worship, and service. They demonstrate a spirited commitment to each other and a deep desire to grow in holiness and in the understanding of our Catholic tradition. Therefore, they have called forth in me the need to constantly develop an increasingly integrated life as a priest, one that meets their own human, intellectual, pastoral, and spiritual needs as the People of God. From them I have come to recognize that priesthood has to be lived in an authentically integrated way, and I began to think about writing on the topic.

In order to write this book, I lived for two summers at Mount Saviour Monastery in Pine City, New York. I could not have asked for a better environment in which to pray, reflect, and then consider the

growth and struggles in the spiritual life. Prior John Thompson and the Benedictine monks at Mount Saviour were hospitable in every sense that their Father Benedict intended. I am deeply grateful for their prayerful support and encouragement.

I also need to thank the people at Liturgical Press. They made the whole process of my proposal becoming a manuscript becoming a published text quite manageable. They provided a tremendous amount of helpful assistance with the organization and clarity of what I was trying to convey.

In addition, I want to acknowledge my bishop, Most Rev. Lawrence Persico. From the moment I told him that my proposal for a book on priestly spirituality had been accepted for publication, he expressed tremendous delight and encouragement. For his support throughout the writing process I am deeply grateful.

Finally, I want to thank my brother, Fr. John Detisch, who has always provided me a home in Erie when I have been serving outside of the diocese in seminary work. He has continually made sure that I had a comfortable place to relax, read, write, and celebrate the Eucharist with a parish community.



# Introduction

*Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink.*

—Luke 5:1-7

## *Finding the Deeper Stream*

When I was a young boy my family vacationed regularly in Cook Forest State Park in Western Pennsylvania. We would take up residence in a cabin and spend several days exploring the beauty and intrigue of nature. My three brothers and I would exude all the youthful confidence (even arrogance) of mighty pioneers setting out to explore, discover, and then master the forces of the mostly untainted natural world. We took literally the words of the Creator to the first human beings: "[F]ill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth" (Gen 1:28).

On our very first excursion into the state park, on our very first day of setting out to “subdue” the natural world and master it, we all decided with great bravado to canoe down the Clarion River that runs through the center of the state park. Not only had none of us ever canoed before, but we were also completely unprepared for how shallow the river could get in the summer. Repeatedly one of our canoes would get stuck on a rock or mired in the mud of the riverbed. A few times we even had to get out of our canoes into the dirty, muddy water and make right our canoes that had gone terribly wrong. Angry words, harsh accusations, and lots of sibling name-calling transpired. By the time we reached the docks of the canoe rental place down the river, we had all had enough. In the end, the river subdued *us*. Needless to say, our enthusiastic but not well-informed adventure became a frustrating, unnerving, and calamitous experience. In subsequent trips to Cook Forest, we avoided canoeing at all costs, blaming the river for being too shallow but not wanting to admit our own incompetence.

Some years later, however, when I vacationed in the same state park with some friends, I met a regular park visitor who shared similar frustrations about canoeing. This all changed for him when he discovered the secret to the river. He told us to look for the darker colored stream in the midst of the river. That was where the water was deeper and more easily navigable. Plus, he told us to rent kayaks rather than canoes since they had flatter bottoms and less chance of getting caught on rocks or stuck in the mud. We took the man’s advice and soon discovered that the way to enjoy paddling down the Clarion River was to find the deeper stream in its midst and make use of the right vessel. There were still a few frustrating shallow spots and annoying rock beds, but we were much more able to right our boats quickly and continue on an enjoyable adventure.

Because of this experience, “finding the deeper stream” has become for me an apt metaphor for my own spiritual biography as a priest—a narrative often mired in frustrations and failed endeavors in ministry; a story that often got stalled by the loss of motivation and inspiration in the midst of rocky situations; an account of priesthood that even devolved at times into anger and blaming of God, the church, and others for what had gone wrong. But once I was helped to begin to navigate the deeper streams of God’s loving presence in my life and within myself, I traveled more easily through the adventures of priestly

life and ministry and have been able to right what has gone wrong more quickly.

This image from my childhood has opened up for me some of the layers within the narrative of the call of the first disciples, often cited in both initial and ongoing priestly formation. The passage from Luke quoted above has much to say about the path of progress within the spiritual biography of seminarians and priests. When responding to the call of Jesus Christ eventually each person needs to hear the challenge to put out into deeper waters and discover how that deeper place is teeming with life. The response to this call needs to occur, however, from some place of familiarity in a person's life, as it did with these first disciples in their normal routine of fishing. Thus, the plunge into deeper waters exhibits both continuity and discontinuity within the spiritual life. In other words, from a place of comfortable regularity from which one has been fishing for a while, Christ will ask each disciple to go someplace unfamiliar, someplace further into the spiritual life—in short, someplace deeper. Furthermore, as with Simon and the others on the lake, to reap the benefits of putting “out into the deep water” one will most likely need the help of other companions who are also striving to do the same. Rarely are the disciples of Christ meant to navigate deeper waters on their own. But first, in their desire to follow Christ, disciples must recognize that the deeper waters even exist.

The process of “finding the deeper stream,” as this book will trace, does not happen easily for the male ego that instinctively seeks success and the achievement of measurable results. Nor does the discovery happen merely through competent and capable functioning as a priest. An adage that I have come to use often with seminarians and priests in spiritual direction is this: *God will use all your gifts and abilities in ministry, but God will draw you closer to himself and deeper into yourself through your weaknesses and inabilities.* It is only when we get stuck on the rocks or mired in the messiness of priestly life that we are forced to find the deeper waters of priestly spirituality. When these difficult moments happen, some priests find the right companions in their lives to help them discover the deeper stream and reap the benefits of the life teeming within it. Other priests get stuck for a long time, mired in the messiness of their lives without any insight that near those muddy waters is a current that can flow into a much more navigable path in the spiritual life. They stay wedged in one place. And unfortunately

there are other priests who, when their familiar path in the spiritual life does not work anymore, retreat into isolated frustration and often leave the stream altogether in anger and blame of others, never to return to the flowing waters of priestly spirituality.

From my own ministry with seminarians and priests over the years and from my own spiritual narrative, a pattern of gnawing questions and emotional conflicts can be identified. They can be expressed in the following ways:

- Even when we have the noblest motives, why does disappointment often become our undoing?
- Even when we have made tremendous personal sacrifices to say yes to God, why can it feel that God does not seem to notice?
- Even when our days are so full of doing good work, why can our nights often become so empty, lonely, or dreadful?

Perhaps the reader has wondered these same questions or others like them. As priests, we begin a vocational journey often striving to live what we see as an honorable calling and a fulfilling life; indeed, priesthood can be all this and more. But we have all seen so many enthusiastic good men leave priesthood so early. We have all known dedicated men find the daily life of ordained ministry too heavy a burden, as well as active, busy priests who seem to talk little of an inner life. Furthermore, we have all witnessed sincere servants of the Gospel develop dreadful habits of escapism and addictive gratification. Most likely, we have seen in ourselves one or more of these patterns. And yet in each of our dioceses and religious communities is a “cloud of witnesses” made up of priests who seem to have discovered a spiritual pathway that helps them navigate the rough waters. They have found the deeper stream. From my perspective, their testimony and biographies reveal three significant stages in developing the inner life of a priest that will be expounded upon in this text.

### *Introduction to the Three Stages of Archetypal Energy*

The premise of this book is that the movement through these three stages happens through a graced shift in the archetypal energy—the

undercurrent operating deep within the seminarian and priest—that is informing his sense of vocation, self-identity, and response to Christ’s call. In their book, *King, Warrior, Magician, Lover: Rediscovering the Archetypes of the Mature Masculine*, Robert Moore and Douglas Gillette remind us of the Jungian concept of archetypes that are deeply at work within the unconscious and are manifested as “instinctual patterns and energy configurations . . . [that] provide the very foundations of our behaviors—our thinking, our feeling, and our characteristic human reactions.”<sup>1</sup> Moore and Gillette echo the findings of many depth psychologists that “deep within every man are blueprints, what we call ‘hard wiring,’ for the calm and positive mature masculine.”<sup>2</sup> Male archetypes abound and their influence on male spirituality is only beginning to be discovered and appreciated. What is very clear in depth psychology is that “different archetypes come on line at different developmental stages.”<sup>3</sup> As human beings progress through life and mature, they do not lose their previously operative archetypes; instead they are assumed into a newer image-cluster that reshapes one’s emotional, psychological, and spiritual patterns.

It is important to note that, from the viewpoint of Christian spirituality, archetypes are not mere psychological constructs, whether of the conscious or unconscious human mind. They also access the divine imprint placed within the core of each human being. Even the ancient spiritual guide Gregory of Nyssa recognized this. In his homily on the Beatitudes, Gregory reflects on the meaning of the beatitude “Blessed are the pure of heart.” He recounts that “blessedness does not lie in knowing something about God, but rather in possessing God within oneself.”<sup>4</sup> Gregory continues that, in the process of being purified, one “will regain likeness to his Archetype. . . . If he then looks into

1. Roger Moore and Douglas Gillette, *King, Warrior, Magician, Lover: Rediscovering the Archetypes of the Mature Masculine* (New York: Harper Collins, 1990), 9.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*, 14.

4. Gregory of Nyssa, *Discourse Six on the Beatitudes* as quoted in “The Office of Readings” for Saturday, Week 12, in *The Liturgy of the Hours: The Roman Rite*, trans. International Committee on English in the Liturgy (New York: Catholic Book Publishing, 1975), 412–13. For the full text of the homily, see Anthony Meredith, *Gregory of Nyssa* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 91–99.

himself, he will see the vision he has longed for. This is the blessedness of the pure of heart: in seeing their own purity they see the divine Archetype mirrored in themselves.”<sup>5</sup>

The process of being purified in the spiritual life and in priesthood not only brings a man closer to God but, in doing so, brings him closer to his True Self. This journey happens through a series of shifts from one form of archetypal energy within a priest to a newer one. These shifts are, however, normally occasioned by a conflict between a man’s inner world and what he repeatedly encounters in the outer world, or at least how he interprets what he is experiencing in the outer world. In the flow of the spiritual life, this is when a seminarian or priest gets caught in the rocky current or gets stuck in waters that once flowed well but have now become too shallow to continue. These frustrating experiences can actually become key liminal moments in the spiritual biography of the seminarian and priest. Potentially, they can become the opportunities to heed the call of Christ to “put out into deep waters and lower your nets for a catch.” When that call is heeded, then one brings his prayer and ministry, as well as his sense of self-identity and priestly vocation, into a deeper connection with Christ that will allow the man to cross the threshold into a stronger and richer spiritual life.

In my estimation, these liminal moments reveal how the many different archetypes operative in the male psyche coalesce into three main levels of energy when applied to the flow of priestly spirituality—three fathoms within “the deep,” if you will. The first fathom is the strong current that draws the man into the water in the first place—to give his life for Christ in a way that will truly matter and genuinely make a difference. This is the Hero archetype, noted by many depth psychologists and anthropologists. The second fathom comes after repeated struggles in the strong current create a desire to find a more peaceful flow of life. This is when the priest learns to navigate the waters with Christ and no longer only for Christ or toward Christ. This stage brings together what I consider to be the dedicated Servant and Friend archetypes within a man. Finally, after further rough waters, the priest can sense that, even while striving to navigate life and ministry with Christ, the true generativity of his life will come from a place of communion—

5. *Ibid.*, 413.

that place where he lives in Christ who lives in him. This is the third fathom; it arises out of the archetype of the Mystic, which others term the Sage or Spiritual Mentor archetype. These fathoms of archetypal energy within a man are three key stages in the spiritual development of priests, beginning when they are seminarians.

While the schema I will present traces a natural progression of archetypal energy from Hero to Servant to Mystic when a seminarian or priest enters more deeply into the spiritual life, the manner in which the grace of God operates is certainly not bound to my schema. While I am suggesting that the archetypal energies and the stages of development by which they manifest themselves are fairly typical in seminarians and priests, in no way can I make an absolute claim that they are normative. Not all seminarians and priests will identify with these archetypes as I characterize them or move through them exactly in the manner I am describing. Some may never advance to deeper levels of the spiritual life; some may begin at an already advanced stage. Nevertheless, because of the level of commonality that I have noticed in the progression of archetypal energy within seminarians and priests, I offer this explication of three stages within the spiritual life as fairly typical of most men in the years before and after ordination to the priesthood. At the very least, I hope the pattern of stages I put forth is helpful for seminarians, priests, formators, and spiritual directors to gain some insights into the connections between one's operative archetypal energies and how they become expressed in the spiritual and ministerial life of a priest or seminarian.

Stage 1 of this pattern can be called "A Noble Hero *for Christ*." I describe it as the coming to awareness, usually but not exclusively in young adulthood, that one wants to live his life for Christ. This is the flowing current—the more meaningful path—for a man whose religious consciousness has been awakened and who is captivated by the person of Jesus Christ and wants to do more than what other careers offer. At this stage, a sense of religious and priestly vocation awakens, leading a man to become a seminarian who is frequently filled with noble desire and enthusiastic zeal. This desire and enthusiasm often continue in the heady months and years after ordination. But when significant disappointment, frustration, loneliness, or even failure occurs, the man who is attentive to the interior life will recognize that a shift needs to occur inside of him. He has to "put out into the deep"

and discover a way to live this noble life from a new place in the spiritual journey.

This is when stage 2 can set in, which I have titled “A Faithful Servant *with* Christ.” The gallant desire to live the life of a priest becomes the more tempered recognition that one must do this not merely out of a motivation *for* Christ but from a desire to live *with* Christ, who is the priest’s intimate and steadfast helper and guide. During this stage, the exercise of ministry arises out of the powerful awareness of the companionship of Christ, who is now given the chance to set the tone and the pathway for priestly life and ministry more vividly. Drawing from the steadfastness of the Hero archetype in the previous stage, the priest is able to navigate rough waters because he sees himself as one still committed to Christ but now as a Servant who is a friend and companion, as one by Christ’s side, which is a shift in archetypal energy. After a while, however, even while ministering alongside Christ, gnawing pangs of continued loneliness and repeated ineffectiveness set in, and with them come feelings of regret or qualms about being unappreciated. All of these can make even the smallest space between a priest and his Divine Companion feel like a gaping chasm of disconnection and alienation. Something more, something deeper is needed. If a priest remains true to the spiritual life, especially in this rocky place where he can get mired in regret and become fixated on considerations of leaving the priesthood, an even deeper stream can be discovered, leading to the next stage.

In stage 3 the companionship of Christ is more fully revealed as the indwelling of Christ, who in turn calls the priest to dwell in him. In this stage the priest is invited to become “A Humble Mystic *in* Christ.” At this point, a priest’s noble desire to live *for* Christ and his faithful friendship *with* Christ becomes communion *in* Christ—the discovery of Christ’s presence deep in one’s core and the experience of one’s apostolic ministry being lived out deep within the priestly heart of Christ. From this archetypal energy of Mystic the priest now experiences celibacy in a new way and sees it as truly generative “fatherhood.” Furthermore, for the Mystic the ups and downs of ordained ministry are all experienced on some level as grace-filled; priesthood, in a freeing and wonderful way, is recognized not to be about the priest himself, who no longer needs it to be.

The narrative that follows will explore more fully each of these stages: *for* Christ, *with* Christ, and *in* Christ. While this book will focus on the spiritual path of priests, I certainly recognize that these stages

may aptly apply in some way to many Christian men and women who have been devoted to the spiritual life and are engaged in apostolic ministry. I do not write this text in order to exclude or to diminish the depth of their inner lives. Because of my ministerial work in seminary formation, however, and my own inner work through my struggles and growth long after priestly ordination, I feel the particular need to help priests with their own ongoing formation and name for them what they might be experiencing in their spiritual narratives.

### *Purposes of This Book*

With all this in mind, I offer this text for the following reasons. First of all, I am indebted to the priests who have inspired me and the spiritual guides whose insights have helped me to find the deeper stream and to keep putting out into that deep. Hopefully, the fruits of their labors will find expression in the pages that follow. Second, I want to assist seminarians and priests who have not yet found their true inner life, either still unsure about how to put out into the deeper water or thinking that what is deep within them is too difficult or cumbersome to navigate. Finding and exploring one's inner life as a priest happens in stages, since there are layers to one's depth. (This is true of everyone, of course, not just of priests.) It also does not happen automatically or without the assistance of spiritual guides who themselves have learned to navigate the deeper currents of ordained ministry. This biographical sketch of priestly life is meant to explore the significant stages in the discovery and development of a fuller inner life in those who respond to and then seek to live authentically the call of Christ to be a priest. It arises out of my own journey in the spiritual life as well as from the many grace-filled opportunities I have had to companion seminarians and priests in their spiritual development.

A third reason for writing this book is my hope that what I sketch as the contours of the spiritual biography of seminarians who become priests will assist those whose ministry either focuses on initial priestly formation programs in seminaries or overseeing programs of ongoing priestly formation in dioceses and religious communities. Neither arena is easy work, but both are always powerful and rewarding ministry. Much has been written to assist those in seminary formation work, but little has been offered regarding the ongoing formation of priests. It is my observation that many dioceses struggle with how best

to implement an effective program of clergy continuing education and formation. Bishops, vicars for clergy, and priest personnel directors become quickly frustrated with the lack of cooperation, participation, and enthusiasm in their presbyterates for days of recollection. They are at a loss at times on how best to offer ongoing educational opportunities and how to attract priests to annual retreats that are comprised of more purposeful silence and reflection rather than mere enjoyable fellowship and recreation. Yet the ongoing intellectual, human, pastoral, and spiritual formation of priests must become and remain a priority in each diocese. It was St. John Paul II who made this clarion call in his pivotal apostolic exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, which addresses both initial priestly formation in seminaries and postordination priestly formation in dioceses and religious orders. The pope is very clear that the ongoing formation of priests is constitutive of the very nature of holy orders. In commenting on the reasons for ongoing priestly formation, St. John Paul states:

We thus see that the proper foundation and original motivation for ongoing formation is contained in the dynamism of the sacrament of holy orders. Certainly there are also purely human reasons which call for the priest to engage in ongoing formation. This formation is demanded by his own continuing personal growth. Every life is a constant path toward maturity, a maturity which cannot be attained except by constant formation. It is also demanded by the priestly ministry seen in a general way and taken in common with other professions, that is, as a service directed to others. There is no profession, job or work which does not require constant updating if it is to remain current and effective. The need to “keep pace” with the path of history is another human reason justifying ongoing formation.<sup>6</sup>

It is, however, the pope’s theological explanation for the need for ongoing formation of priests that reflects the deeper stream of spiritual growth and development within a priest. St. John Paul asserts:

The sacrament of holy orders, by its nature (common to all the sacraments) as a “sign” may be considered, and truly is, a word of

6. Pope John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, Postsynodal Apostolic Exhortation, no. 70.

God. It is a word of God which calls and sends forth. It is the strongest expression of the priest's vocation and mission. By the sacrament of holy orders, God calls the candidate "to" the priesthood "coram ecclesia." The "come, follow me" of Jesus is proclaimed fully and definitively in the sacramental celebration of his Church. It is made manifest and communicated by the Church's voice, which is heard in the words of the bishop who prays and imposes his hands. The priest then gives his response, in faith, to Jesus' call. "I am coming, to follow you." From this moment there begins that response which, as a fundamental choice, must be expressed anew and reaffirmed through the years of his priesthood in countless other responses, all of them rooted in and enlivened by that "yes" of holy orders. In this sense one can speak of a vocation "within" the priesthood. The fact is that God continues to call and send forth, revealing his saving plan in the historical development of the priest's life and the life of the Church and of society. It is in this perspective that the meaning of ongoing formation emerges. Permanent formation is necessary in order to discern and follow this constant call or will of God.<sup>7</sup>

I would be very heartened to discover that the ensuing pages of text might help both seminaries and dioceses in their important and complementary tasks of initial and ongoing priestly formation. I hope that this text might help seminary formators and spiritual directors to name for seminarians the elements of priestly life in the years ahead and how to navigate the shifts that will happen inside of them down the road. Furthermore, perhaps this book can give some priests enduring very "dark nights" a ray of light and hope. Conceivably it can help those who have lost contact with their original motives for ordination to find even deeper and more enduring ones. And perhaps it can help those priests who feel the tug to work harder on their spiritual lives to recognize what concrete steps they might take toward attaining that goal.

A final reason for my writing this book needs some explanation; it is a desire for greater communion among priests. It has been no secret that many dioceses and religious communities are experiencing a generational divide that has not diminished in recent years, though the hope was that it would. What has been often described as the clash between "Vatican II priests" and "John Paul II" priests has become

7. Ibid.

even more exacerbated with what is now being called “the Francis effect” and what I have termed “the Benedict allegiance.” This clash is most clearly evidenced in matters of liturgical style and preference, homiletic content and demeanor, as well as choices of clerical garb. In addition, priests and seminarians are caught between the maelstroms that have arisen as different ideologies compete for the definitive manner in which the Second Vatican Council should be interpreted. My hope is that by delving into the contours and texture of the nature in which priestly spirituality develops and grows all priests will see themselves and those with whom they disagree in the same boat. After all, every priest struggles at times and every priest begins the vocational journey with the same energy of noble enthusiasm and zeal. Likewise, every priest has been called to put out into the deep when gnawing questions or conflicted experiences arise.

### *Five Basic Principles*

As the chapters in this book unfold, there are five basic principles that will be traced throughout. These form the framework of understanding the shifts that occur as a priest navigates the currents of the spiritual life from one archetype to the next.

*First of all*, the unavoidable experiences of disappointment, pain, brokenness, and emptiness ought to be regarded as grace-filled invitations to go deeper into the spiritual life of priesthood. While they may not feel like graced experiences, and they are not to be seen as caused by God, they need to be recognized as moments in which God has entered intimately in order to help each person “put out into the deep.”

*Second*, in each stage it becomes clear that where a priest primarily locates the brokenness in life to which he is called to reach out ministerially—that is where the priest will most fully direct his spiritual energy and find his connection to Christ. For instance, we will see how the Hero, while recognizing he is a sinful human being himself, will primarily see sinfulness and brokenness “out there” to be remedied for Christ. He will see all the things wrong in the world and in people’s lives from which he wants to help rescue them on behalf of Christ the Savior. In the next stage, the Servant primarily sees brokenness all around him and as a part of himself that is to be met and addressed with Christ’s help. He knows that he is not going to end this brokenness but that he has a role in drawing all of it into a redemptive en-

counter with Christ. Furthermore, at this point the priest sees that the sinful and shattered nature of human life comes in very personal forms, in the lives of people he meets every day and in his own life as well. It is only as a man yoked to Christ that he could meet this brokenness and bring to others what Christ desires to bring to them. Finally, a priest's move into archetypal energy of the Mystic happens when he comes to the very humbling insight that brokenness is at his deepest core, never to be escaped; it is the place of deepest communion with Christ and the place from which he is to meet and minister to all other brokenness in others.

*Third*, in each stage the content and style of a priest's prayer will shift as he moves from one archetype to the next. While he may continue spiritual practices from the past, and is to remain true to his promises to pray the Liturgy of the Hours and celebrate the sacred mysteries, he may also discover that the manner in which he engages these practices has a different tone and quality to them. Furthermore, he may discontinue some forms of personal or devotional prayer and adopt different ones that prove to be more fruitful.

*Fourth*, while the priest is to keep the Eucharist at the center of his spiritual life, he will recognize that it beckons him onward in different ways in each stage of the journey. For instance, for the priest as Hero for Christ, the Eucharist finds its importance as the redemptive sacrifice of Christ offered on behalf of others (living and deceased); it is what the broken, sinful world needs from Christ. When he enters the stage of the Servant *with* Christ, the priest discovers that the Eucharist is the profound place of meeting Christ's real presence and companionship in the concreteness of human life. As this place of encounter, the Eucharist can transform lives, not only the priest's, but also the people whom he serves. Finally, when the priest recognizes his call to be a Mystic *in* Christ, the Eucharist reveals its significance as the broken Body of Christ and the poured out Blood of Christ in which all human brokenness finds redemptive communion. In the Eucharist, the priest's own broken self is intimately joined to Christ's self-gift and self-emptying, which in turn bolsters the priest's ability to guide his people toward eucharistic communion with Christ in their own brokenness.

*Fifth*, it is important to note that no matter where a seminarian or priest is within the stages of his own spiritual biography all the stages are within him to some degree. If he is truly open to the workings of God's grace and truly responding to the Christ's call to "put out into

deep water,” then even though he is operating out of one specific archetypal energy at the moment, the other energies are within him as well, summoning him to go deeper and enabling him to continue in the spiritual journey and in priestly ministry. Thus, each archetype is present from the beginning in different proportions of influence. Furthermore, as the priest moves from one stage to the next in the spiritual life, the previous archetypal energy is drawn into the deeper water and becomes operative in a different way within the new archetype. In other words, the aspects of each priestly archetype that are laden with grace will never be lost along the spiritual path.

As this text traces the stages of the spiritual path of priests, it will become evident how priestly spirituality engages the realities of the priest’s humanity. The archetypal influences at the core of a priest’s humanness are an important dimension of how God’s grace often initially draws a man toward priesthood and then continually draws the priest deeper and deeper into the spiritual life, transforming his humanity along the way so that it becomes a clearer icon of the priesthood of Jesus Christ. In the “Catalog of Virtue” that Pope Francis offered as a Christmas address to the Curia in December 2015, he stated:

Spirituality is the backbone of all service in the Church and in the Christian life. It is what nourishes all of our activity, sustaining and protecting it from human frailty and daily temptation. Humanity is what embodies the truthfulness of our faith: those who renounce their humanity renounce everything. . . . Spirituality and humanity, while innate qualities, are a potential needing to be activated fully, attained completely, and demonstrated daily.<sup>8</sup>

To that activation, attainment, and daily living out of the interplay between spirituality and humanity within the lives of seminarians and priests we now turn.

8. Pope Francis, “A Catalog of Virtue,” in *With the Smell of the Sheep: The Pope Speaks to Priests, Bishops, and Other Shepherds*, ed. Giuseppe Merola (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2017), 276.

## ✝ CHAPTER ONE

# A Noble Hero *for* Christ

*I have called you by name, you are mine.*

*When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;  
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you.*

—Isaiah 43:1b-3a

### *Awakening a Sense of Vocation*

Vocation recruitment has become a high priority for every diocese. Many of the websites for vocation offices around the country have links to recruitment videos produced by different dioceses, religious organizations, and Catholic publishers. While each of these videos differs in content, they all have several common features: they evidence a professional quality of production, replete with stirring music and captivating images of healthy young men engaged in ministry; they feature seminarians and priests who appear to be excited and passionate about their vocation journey and their religious commitment; and they recount story lines of men who have felt “called by name” and now desire to give their lives to what they have discerned as the highest noble cause. The content of these videos captures well the nature of the initial stage of the spiritual life of a priest as seen in the lives of recently ordained men and young men in seminary formation exhibiting the energy of the first fervor of their commitment.

Bishop Robert Barron’s *Word on Fire Catholic Ministries* has produced a video called “Heroic Priesthood.” It focuses on what life is like in the seminary for men who are discerning priesthood, and it does this through the lens of several guys who enjoy playing basketball, which is used as a metaphor for the common pursuit of priesthood

that binds these men together. In the video one seminarian describes how playing this sport allows him to stay physically fit and energetic so that he can take care of the gift God has given him—the call to priesthood. The seminarian remarks: “Now basketball is in service to the greatest good, is in service to God.” His experience of the dedication and commitment needed for playing basketball allows this man to assert with great conviction about pursuing priesthood, “This guy Jesus, if you can muster the trust to follow him into the breach . . . you go there with him; there’s glory on the other side. I believe that ordination and the years to follow will be filled with that glory.”<sup>1</sup>

Another vocation recruitment video, titled “I Will Follow,” features the powerful conversion stories of two men who are now priests. One of these priests, Mike, recounts his tremendous anger at the church when he was a young man, though he stayed connected to the church. Mike even became a lay missionary in Central America after college. While there, he remained angry and even openly mocked the local priest who served the mission. When Mike became deathly ill, though, this local priest immediately came to anoint him and comfort him. This experience set in motion a dramatic change of heart within the man, who eventually heard God’s call to priesthood and responded with a definitive, “I will be your priest.” As the video progresses, the now-ordained Fr. Mike is pictured in his ministry surrounded by young people eagerly attentive to what he is offering them. When the video returns to its interview of this priest, more of his thoughts about his vocation are shared. Fr. Mike states: “It is the most important thing I could do with my life. . . . As a father, as a priest, I get to heal God’s children. As a father, as a priest, I get to feed God’s children.”<sup>2</sup>

Finally, perhaps the most emblematic video that portrays the call to priesthood as the noblest pursuit is one titled “Why Not Priest?” Featuring young men speaking several different languages, the video offers quick responses by these seminarians as to why they are pursuing priesthood. The following are some of the reasons they offer:

“Because when I die only what I’ve done for God counts.”

“Because to follow Christ is the best adventure ever.”

1. “Heroic Priesthood,” *Word on Fire Ministries*, <https://www.wordonfire.org/resources/video/heroic-priesthood/4432/>.

2. “Will You Follow?,” *Ascension Press*, <http://willyoufollow.com/>.

“Because God wants me to.”

“Because one day I asked him what he wanted me to do.”

“Because a lot of people don’t know Christ as I do.”

And most telling of all, “Because we need heroes.”<sup>3</sup>

The videos described above, and others like them, are anything but subtle. They are direct, dramatic, and filled with stirring images, music, and narrative. Since these videos are geared toward the man who might be considering a call to priesthood, they appeal to that part of the man’s consciousness that effectively engages his desire to do something magnanimous with his life. The producers of these videos are making a psychological “pitch” aimed at the element within a man’s psyche—a man’s ego energy—that stirs with a desire to live something very honorable, perhaps even something quite different from what he has been or is now currently living. They appeal to the Hero archetype.

Recalling that an archetype contains an amalgam of deep energies within a person, the priest as Hero also holds within it the desire within many seminarians and priests to be the upstanding father figure who magnanimously provides for the needs of his faith community (his priestly family) and confidently leads them to noble ends. The Hero also contains the desire to be the mighty prophetic teacher who will forthrightly challenge all that is wrong in the world and in society (which are often characterized as being overly secularized or even “godless”) and teach the truths that will correct all the mistaken or misguided doctrinal and moral notions that people have.

While the ego energy exhibited at this Hero stage can be very evident and engaging in some men, it can be forceful, perhaps even brusque, in others. And in still other personalities it can be subtle and restrained. Regardless of the manner of expression, this ego energy is the necessary force that operates within the process of identity development in which individuals seek to discover their rightful place in the world. The “ego self,” as many developmental psychologists and spiritual writers call it, is the product of each person’s response to the most influential forces in the world around him or her by which a person comes to an individuated sense of self. It is at this point that a person decides, “This is who I want to be; this is what my life is to be about.”

3. “Why Not Priest?,” *Legionnaires of Christ*, <https://www.whynotpriest.org/resources-1>.

When seen within this context, the initial stage of priestly vocation often awakens amid a quest to discover the life a man now recognizes he is destined to live or, more accurately, is called to live. As with any noble quest, it is fueled by a desire to achieve an honorable goal, to accomplish a meaningful mission, and to become someone who can make a true difference in the lives of others. It is quite normal for a man emerging into adulthood to want his life to matter or for a man well into adulthood to discover at some point that his life could offer the world so much more. When a religious experience undergirds these moments of vocational awakening, a Christian man often concludes, "I want to live my life for Christ." Subsequently, some of these men further discern, "I want to become a priest for Christ, to do great things for the church and in the world on behalf of Christ." This is when a man is swept into the initial current of priestly spirituality, and it is a wonderful, exciting, but also daunting venture into the interior life and response to the call of Christ.

### *Recognizing a Mixture of Motives*

At the beginning of the scriptural account of Simon Peter's commitment to Christ, he is a man of intensity, often getting it wrong more than he gets it right. Though he will be declared the rock of the church, at first Peter struggles with rather rocky and sometimes impetuous claims that he wants to follow a heroic notion of the Savior, presumably wanting to be that Savior's heroic disciple. For instance, Peter's notion of the messianic Savior does not allow him to accept that Christ should have to suffer (Mark 16:22), and he winces when his hero Jesus stoops down in the role of a household slave to wash his feet (John 13:8). When Christ speaks of his own impending death as well as Peter's forthcoming denial, Peter adamantly claims that he is willing to go to prison and to die for Christ (Luke 22:33). Eventually, tradition tells us, Simon Peter does heroically die as a martyr for Christ after being imprisoned in Rome during the time of Nero's persecution of the Christian community in the 60s of the first century AD. Peter's fascination with a heroic Savior and his desire to follow him valiantly might have begun with an ego energy that had not yet been fully transformed by the Spirit of Christ, but eventually this impetuous, strong-willed disciple, who sometimes got it wrong, in the end gets it very right.

As with the beginnings of Simon Peter's vocational story, in examining the first stage of a vocational journey, it is important for any seminarian or priest to probe as honestly as possible the mixture of motives that lies beneath the desire to live his life heroically for Christ. In our broken human condition, there are no such things as pure motives, only motives that need to be purified. All religious desire and longing is an amalgam of true selfless desire and lingering residue of self-interest or self-protection. This was true of Simon Peter; it is also true of all of us. As human beings, we simply cannot avoid this. Therefore, it is vital that a seminarian and later priest, along with his spiritual director, come to an accurate, honest, and forthright appraisal of the mixture of motives that lies within him. It is important for each of us to recognize that there are healthy sides of our operative archetypal energy but also unhealthy or undeveloped dimensions as well. Roger Moore and Douglas Gillette point out: "Human development does not always proceed so neatly . . . ; there are mixtures of the archetypal influences all along the way."<sup>4</sup> Healthy archetypal energy often surfaces in the nobler motives within us; the unhealthy archetypal energy often lurks within the unstated and self-protective instincts that try to keep certain dimensions of a person's character or personality in the shadows.

The more noble motives are often the stated ones. These are to be strengthened, honored, and celebrated (as well as featured in vocation promotional videos). The unstated motives, however, which are often less honorable and sometimes even unrecognized within a person's consciousness, must eventually come into the light so that they can be psychologically and spiritually integrated. If this is not done, these unstated but very operative motives will become the seeds of a priest's vocational undoing, whether in terms of wrongful behavior, an empty spiritual life, a pattern of self-absorbed habits, ineffective ministry, or a departure from priesthood.

Let us take a look at the most common operative motives that fuel a vocational desire to live one's life for Christ. They function on two levels: (1) the conscious, stated level and (2) the unstated level of motives a person may be conscious of or may not even recognize.

4. Roger Moore and Douglas Gillette, *King, Warrior, Magician, Lover: Rediscovering the Archetypes of the Mature Masculine* (New York: Harper Collins, 1990), 14.

### *Identifying the Stated, Conscious Level of Motives*

In working with priests and seminarians in both the external forum of priestly formation and the internal forum of spiritual direction, the most commonly expressed motivations for entering the seminary and becoming a priest that I hear are different echoes of what were presented in the videos described earlier. Without the stirring music and vivid images of those videos, in undramatic but equally powerful conversations with seminarians and priests, I often hear them say things like:

- “I want to make a difference in people’s lives.”
- “I like helping people.”
- “I want to give my life to God as completely as possible.”
- “I enjoy going to Mass and helping in my parish so I see these interests as signs from God to be a priest.”
- “I want more people to have Christ in their lives.”
- “I want to do something that really matters.”
- “I want others to get what I get out of practicing the Catholic faith.”
- “I think it will be awesome to celebrate Mass and absolve people’s sins in confession.”
- “I want to give people the truth about Christ because so many people seem lost or without morals.”
- “I think the church has the right answers to a lot of the deeper questions people are asking and I want to help share those answers by preaching the Word of God and teaching on behalf of the church.”
- “I cannot ignore the tug I feel to become a priest and work for the church.”

This list is not meant to be exhaustive but it captures the range of altruistic desires that express the religious, selfless, even at times zealous intentions often felt and stated in vocational discernment and decision making.

To encounter a seminarian or priest living out these motivations in a genuinely healthy and well-formed manner is a wonderful experience

of grace. There is an energy exuded in the man's way of engaging in ministry that is as captivating as it is inspiring. This is a vocational lifestyle that truly portrays a "Noble Hero for Christ" because it can so often lead others to recognize the presence and action of Christ at work in their own lives through the ministry this man offers on behalf of the church.

### *Identifying the Unstated or Unconscious Level of Motives*

When I have been privileged to work with a seminarian or priest in spiritual direction over a longer period of time, if he is someone willing to explore more fully the complexity of his inner life, another level of operative motives becomes clear. Some of these motives the man has been aware of and slowly brings to the light when an appropriate level of trust develops. Other unstated motives a man is not even aware of and does not recognize as operative within him for years, if ever. It usually takes a significant experience of heartache, disappointment, conflict, loneliness, or spiritual darkness to instigate a level of self-honesty and insight that makes these once unknown or unadmitted motives more clearly seen. The more "shame-based" a man is, however, and the more shameful he might feel about these other motives, the less likely he will be able to share them openly and honestly with another, including a spiritual director.

Even the most inspiring seminarian and captivating priest has within him deeper and sometimes darker motives that have developed over the years as the ego self's way of navigating the difficulties of life, dealing with any painful elements of one's childhood, or compensating for the missing elements in his perception of himself as a man in today's society. Unstated motives operate within every human being and most adults fail to integrate them in their self-awareness and in the way they invest themselves in the larger world. For seminarians and priests who live public exterior lives that are to be shaped by a well-grounded interior life, the failure to admit self-honestly and to examine directly these unstated motives can be disastrous. A forthright analysis of these unstated motives, however, often helps to lead a man to the next chapter of his spiritual biography (more on this in chapter 2).

What are some of the unstated or unrecognized motives for priesthood that a man may be aware of but often does not want to admit?

They are often discovered in a twofold manner. First of all, some seminarians and priests will eventually share their underlying operative motives with a formator or spiritual director when they have come to recognize these motives in themselves and have developed a level of trust that has made these men free enough to share what they have uncovered. Second, some underlying operative motives become apparent in formation or spiritual direction sessions as patterns that come to light through the self-reporting seminarians and priests offer, even if they have either not yet recognized these motives in themselves or not yet felt free enough to talk about them. These underlying motives often take the following shapes:

- “I am afraid of intimacy with another and so I don’t have to worry about that with a celibate lifestyle.”
- “I need to be important or gain recognition.”
- “I have a compulsion to be right all the time and being a priest gives me that credibility and authority for people to accept what I am saying.”
- “I come from a very unsettled experience of family life and so I have a strong need for ‘belonging’; a priest always belongs to a community of people.”
- “I could atone for my sinful past by becoming a priest.”
- “I would please my religious parents/grandparents, who mean a lot to me, and make them very happy.”
- “I do not want to disappoint those who keep telling me I should be a priest.”
- “I am ashamed of my sexual energy/orientation, and celibacy would free me from the shame and struggle I am experiencing.”
- “I have not done well in other careers/endeavors.”
- “I think the struggles I have had in my life can help me to fix the problems in other people’s lives.”
- “I like the comfortable lifestyle I have seen some priests live.”

None of these motives should be condemned in and of themselves by isolating them from the whole complex of drives within a man. Nor should any of them ever be dismissed. As mentioned already, they

often arise out of the survival skills and defense mechanisms a man developed as he moved from childhood into adulthood bruised by the realities of his broken human condition but also shaped by a noble religious instinct within him that could not be ignored. Within the interplay between the stated and the unstated motives, the instinct arising from the mature Hero archetype often clashes with the needy Child archetype who instinctively seeks affirmation, security, protection, and attention.<sup>5</sup>

### *Fostering the Prayer Life of First Fervor*

Underneath all the operative motives mentioned above is a religious instinct that nudges a man toward a priestly vocation. It stems from the same instinct that awakens the desire to become a spiritual person. While it is true that no one's spiritual biography is dictated by some preconceived script, there are certain patterns of prayer that emerge in each chapter of priestly life and ministry, including the all-important foundational one. In this initial period, exterior enthusiasm, zeal, and dedication are the evidence of a seminarian's or priest's interior captivity with the heroic ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ. These virtues also give witness to an interior recognition that it is very worthwhile for a man to give his life to the mission of the church. The seminarian or priest has come to the conclusion, "This is where I belong; this is what I ought to be doing." This spirituality of Christ-centeredness and church-committedness places the man in a relationship of giving himself to what he has discerned as the ultimate "Other" worthy of his life's energy. This "Other" is both Christ and his church who stand before the man as the beckoning icon of what his life ought to be. On days of heightened spiritual awareness, the man awakens in the morning hoping to see in the mirror a worthy representative of Christ and an effective minister of the church. At night, he hopes to retire to bed with the sense of contentment over what he has accomplished that day. This is what comprises the first fervor of a faithful seminarian and priest.

Since the archetypal energy of this stage of spiritual development often seeks to accomplish something for Christ and for the church, this

5. See Moore and Gillette, *King, Warrior, Magician, Lover*, 13–33.

same energy is seen in the seminarian's or priest's approach to his prayer life. During first fervor, there is a pronounced dedication to "accomplishing" prayer in order to fulfill what is expected of him by Christ and the church. To this end, a seminarian or priest will routinely engage in different acts of prayer: reciting the rosary; reading and praying the Divine Office; doing spiritual reading, often focused on the heroic lives of saints; engaging in devotional practices, especially those that reconnect him with a prior religious experience that was pivotal in his own vocational awakening; doing *lectio divina*, often with the goal of gaining insight for preaching; and trying to succeed at developing a true holy hour spent meditating before the Blessed Sacrament, which is frequently regarded as the true achievement of spiritual success. In addition, after ordination, the priest will also see his role in the Eucharist as vital to his spiritual life. At this initial stage that role is often described as "offering the Sacrifice of the Mass" on behalf of the church for others or "drawing others into an awesome liturgy that transforms their faith"; again, the imagery of a heroic enterprise dominates his spiritual and theological interpretation of what the Eucharist is.

In addition, the Blessed Virgin Mary as a true hero of commitment to Christ often figures prominently at this time. She is regarded as a powerful source of inspiration for dedicating one's life completely to Christ and giving oneself to God in noble chastity. Pope Francis appeals to this devotion to Mary in priests when he calls them to the grace of "apostolic audacity." He states:

We humbly and confidently ask Our Lady for this grace—she who has been called "the first evangelizer." . . . She is the first to experience interiorly the joy of setting out to evangelize and to participate in the unprecedented audacity of the Son and of contemplating and proclaiming how God "has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and has lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty." From this audacity of Mary we are invited to participate as priests of the holy Church."<sup>6</sup>

6. Pope Francis, "The Grace of Apostolic Audacity," in *I Ask You, Be Shepherds: Reflections on Pastoral Ministry*, trans. Michael O'Hearn (New York: Herder and Herder, 2015), 35.

The attraction to this apostolic audacity fuels the Hero archetype of seminarians and priests in first fervor. The spiritual practices adopted to achieve this audacity are chosen because they are more easily measured as successful than are other forms of prayer, and they provide a stronger sense of being anchored in the things of God. In striving to find that strong anchoring and to develop a genuine prayer life, a man can point to these practices and say to himself with affirming satisfaction things like: “I was able to get in all of my prayers today that I have promised to pray”; “The time I spent before the Blessed Sacrament is getting closer to a true holy hour”; “My experience of *lectio divina* brought me some good insights.” In this all-important first chapter of the spiritual biography of a priest, what is measurable, attainable, and tangible is far more valuable than other spiritual practices that might develop later that would lead a person into the ineffable and mystical dimensions of the spiritual life.

A man’s commitment to achieving a better spiritual life at this first stage helps to embed within his inner spirit the inviolable need for prayer and the importance of developing a deeper sense of communion with Christ. These graces will serve him well in the later chapters of his spiritual biography, especially when the affective experiences of affirmation in prayer and ministry become conflicted or begin to wane, signaling the beginning of the end of first fervor.

Concurrent with the spiritual practices mentioned above, the Noble Hero for Christ will often discover during his reflection time an intense scrutiny of his behavior and attitudes, often revealing his faults and failings. The seminarian or priest can become acutely aware of how, where and when he has fallen short of being a true icon of Christ or a completely noble servant of the church. If the man regularly celebrates the sacrament of reconciliation with an insightful confessor, he may begin to discover the grace of God’s abiding love for him even when his behavior, habits, inclinations, or dispositions have not been noble or appropriate. He may eventually come to recognize God’s love as the *starting point* of his repentance and confession, not its result. Likewise, he may begin to sense that he is called to experience the constancy of God’s love and mercy, not only when he has done good or great things for Christ and for the church, but even when the seminarian or priest gets things very wrong. This deepening awareness will become the seeds for the new chapter in his spiritual biography, for it

will carry the man from the prior stage of wanting to accomplish a heroic spiritual and ministerial life for Christ and for the church to the beginnings of the next stage in which he will have to find a way to stay committed to prayer and ordained ministry once he recognizes that he will never quite be the hero he was hoping to be.

### *Dealing with Disappointment and Facing One's Own Limitations*

In my diocese we regularly celebrate the significant ordination anniversaries of priests during our annual presbyteral convocation. A few years after I was ordained, a priest representing that year's silver jubilarians preached at the Jubilarian Liturgy. He and his classmates were ordained at the beginning of the Second Vatican Council. In his homily, this jubilarian commented on the manner of seminary training he received in the preconciliar years and then quite accurately stated that he had "been ordained for a church that ceased to be." As I listened to his words, I began to recall the exciting vision of church that I experienced in my seminary years, which took place two decades after the council. By that time so much of the ecclesiology and theology of priesthood within the conciliar documents had found its way into seminary classrooms and formation programs. I recollected how a great deal of what I learned seemed filled with tremendous hope and wonderful possibilities for what the church could be and how a priest could minister within that church. My early years of priesthood, however, were marred by the harsh realization that the theological vision I had learned and had been formed in had not yet come to pass and did not seem likely to occur anytime soon. In contrast to the jubilarian's comments, I said to myself with more than a little sadness in my heart, "I've been trained for a church that has yet to be."

From our perch of idealistic certitude, my classmates and I looked at the pastors to whom we were assigned and noticed that they seemed excited about the vision of Vatican II but struggled with how best to go about doing it. Often they had to contend with forceful malcontents who were still angry about the changes in the church after Vatican II. For these malcontents "Vatican II" was a term used in derision. Their anger was something for which my classmates and I were quite unprepared. It was dispiriting for us. Furthermore, we were imbued with

a confidence that Vatican II was truly inspired by the Holy Spirit and that same Spirit was calling us to live out priestly ministry from the conciliar tenets of collegiality, subsidiarity, empowerment of lay ministry, dynamic preaching, fostering liturgy and sacramental ritual that was engaging, and advocating for social justice. We could not understand how good Catholic parishioners could oppose these principles or have a disinterest about them. Nor could we fathom how competent priests could minister in a manner different from what we were taught as all-important principles. (How's that for ministerial hubris on our part?) In response to all of this, there were at times anger, resentment, complaining, and friction with pastors and other priests. In those early years of ordained ministry, some classmates became very bitter; others requested a transfer to a new assignment; a few left priesthood. Eventually those who stayed within active ministry had to realize that noble idealism and harsh reality will always inevitably confront each other no matter what the profession, the moment in history, or the place of assignment. The challenge was to develop a healthy balance that allowed the ideals that truly reflected the will of God to be expressed appropriately in the concrete realities of our priestly ministry. Trying to develop this balance was where the need to return to prayer over and over again came into play. Without that prayer, we noticed how our inner life and our outward enthusiasm for priesthood fell apart. Within our prayer an undefined experience of some deeper reality beckoning us from inside of us began to emerge. It would take some time before that inchoate experience developed into a new level of a personal relationship with Christ (described in the next chapter).

Every newly ordained priest (and not so newly ordained) will eventually come up against harsh disappointments about the concrete realities of priestly life and ministry vis-à-vis the ideals of priesthood he has carried inside of him up to and after ordination. Furthermore, he will have to face the painful recognition that he is not able to do well everything expected of him; perhaps some things he might not even enjoy doing at all. This is when first fervor ends and can either lead to a deeper current of spiritual growth and priestly life or get mired in disillusion, despair, perhaps even leading to departure from the priesthood.

Not even the disciples of Jesus were immune from this. They too had first fervor and then experienced a loss of that fervor after Jesus

sent them out on mission in pairs. Luke's gospel recounts how, when the disciples got their first taste of doing ministry on Christ's behalf, they experienced great joy and excitement over being able to expel demons in his name (Luke 10:17). Matthew's gospel, however, also adds to the portrait of the disciples' initial foray into ministry a moment in which they succumbed to confusion and bewilderment over their inability to expel the demon in a young boy. For this, Jesus even castigates them: "Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, 'Why could we not cast it out?' He said to them, 'Because of your little faith'" (Matt 17:19-20). In a further mission of being sent by Jesus as emissaries to Samaria to prepare the people for Jesus' arrival, the fervor of some of these disciples turned to anger, as evidenced in James and John, who were aptly named "sons of thunder." When the people refused to receive Jesus, James and John ask for permission to call down fire from heaven upon them. But their comment and indignation earn a stern rebuke from Jesus (see Luke 9:54-55).

Every priest dealing with disappointment can easily become a "son of thunder," angrily casting blame on the people and situations that are not receiving well what he has been absolutely convinced he has been sent by Christ to do. The important ideals of which the zealous man is firmly convinced could include the theology he has been taught and excited about, the sense of the church's mission that he sees as indispensable at the moment, the rules and regulations of the church that he has accepted and tried to adhere to wholeheartedly, the style of liturgy that he enjoys the most, the devotional practices that have come to mean a lot to him, the moral precepts and analysis of social and political issues that he regards as the only true way to approach things. A rigid stance in these aforementioned areas has all the ingredients for vocational collapse or ministerial malpractice. Any priest with a good sense of insight will recognize that he cannot go on with such thunderous and self-righteous indignation. Hopefully, he will come to recognize that rigidity, vehemence, and self-righteous indignation are features of the unhealthy shadow side of the Hero archetype. All archetypes have their healthy, positive side and their negative shadow. When the shadow surfaces, the priest will need to acknowledge it and be aware of its effects in his temperament. He will then need to take all this (including his anger, frustration, and disappointment) into his prayer so as not to abandon prayer, which often happens

at this juncture because the negative shadow will try to block out the light that comes from prayer and insight.

Equally dangerous to a priestly vocation is when a priest turns the shadow side of the Hero in on himself. He cannot let his anger, frustration, and disappointment distort his once-noble self-giving to Christ into toxic self-blaming that is far from the heart of Jesus. This is when a man will have to pray about his own shortcomings and limitations, learning to accept the realities of his true creatureliness as God does and let go of an idealized version of himself. The priest will need to seek communion with Christ in the midst of his failings and mistakes and not regard his personal limitations as limitations on Christ's desire to continue to use his life for the sake of the Gospel.

A final peril that each priest needs to avoid is the compensatory behavior that can often arise at the time when anger, frustration, and disappointment dominate a man's temperament. Working through the anguish of this stage is hard work. It requires a significant amount of "tunneling" into the interior life. For those priests unaccustomed to such depth and rigor with the interior work or for those men more predisposed to seeking out quick, easy fixes in their lives, what can emerge is a pattern of seeking hurried relief from their anguish by engaging in overeating, significant alcohol consumption, gambling, self-indulgent purchasing of personal items, online addictions, and even sexual encounters.

### *Navigating the Spiritual Needs of the Afflicted Hero*

What is vital for a priest to realize as his first fervor begins to fade (or suddenly evaporates) is that he cannot reject all that has stirred within his religious life up to that point. Spiritual and psychological growth is an organic process that cannot and will not happen all at once. Prior stages must be regarded as grace-filled steps toward each subsequent stage; they ought not to be dismissed with scorn, shame, or derision. Nor can a priest condemn those who have different religious stirrings or are at earlier stages of religious growth. Hopefully, a priest at this point will be able to surrender to Christ in prayer all the ingredients within his interior mind, heart, and will that were captivated enough by Christ to emerge as the vocational desire to be a Noble Hero for Christ and his church. By surrendering all these interior elements in

prayer, the priest can open himself up to discover what Christ's Spirit now seeks to do in his interior life, especially with the "absolute" principles, the firmly maintained priorities, the long-held dreams and desires, the personality traits and disposition that have made this man the priest he now is. By entering deeper into a mode of prayer that listens to the stirrings of Holy Spirit inside of him and by engaging in spiritual direction that seeks to discover the wisdom of the Holy Spirit in a mentor or spiritual director, the priest can come to admit and hand over to the Lord whatever inside of him now needs to be reexamined, reappraised, and reconstituted on a different level of heroic commitment to Jesus Christ. The spiritual needs of the priest at this stage are to lead him to the resources that can, in the words of St. Paul to Timothy, "rekindle the gift of God that is within" (2 Tim 1:6).

For God's gift of a priestly vocation to be enkindled, it is crucial that the man engage in three key spiritual practices: (1) seeking out spiritual direction; (2) making a yearly silent, directed retreat; and (3) joining a priest support group, but one in which the men are willing to talk about the interior life and not just conduct a communal gripe session about the difficulties of priestly life or their current assignments. These practices have been pivotal in my own spiritual growth and the necessary rekindling of my sense of vocation. Without all three of these commitments in place, I know I would never have been able to endure or negotiate the vicissitudes of priestly life, especially the difficult and painful periods. When a seminarian or priest seeks me out for spiritual direction, I tell him very early on in the relationship that I want him eventually to include the other two elements of priestly spiritual nourishment as well, if they are not already in place. For me all three elements remain important because each one helps to clarify and deepen different aspects of priestly spirituality.

*First of all*, meeting with a spiritual director on a regular basis always forces a priest to a level of self-honesty about what is stirring inside of him, what lies beneath his behavior and decisions, and how he may or may not be hearing God in his prayer. By articulating to a trusted listener the content of one's inner life, that content can be revealed more clearly to the man himself, including the operative motives he may not yet have acknowledged or integrated and that may be undermining his true self-giving in priesthood. In spiritual direction, the patterns and pitfalls, the graces and grievances of one's inner life be-

come more acutely recognized and known. In addition, the reflective listening and the sage advice of a good spiritual director can offer two key components for spiritual growth: affirmation of the ways a man is in sync with God, and challenge about what he might be distorting or ignoring in his assessment of what is going on inside of him and in his priestly life and ministry.

For any priest dealing with disillusionment, the importance of spiritual direction cannot be understated. I would go so far as to conclude that such a priest without a spiritual director risks the danger of experiencing vocational collapse and engaging in grave ministerial malpractice. In spiritual direction a priest can find a new clarity of motivations. Perhaps the heretofore unacknowledged and unexamined operative motives can be recognized by a priest as he trusts and listens to the objective perspective a spiritual director can bring. That objectivity can help a priest identify which motives might need to be more honored, which ones ought to be discarded, and which ones could perhaps be reshaped so as to be more fitting with the real features of priestly life. Furthermore, the priest's self-reporting to his spiritual director about the content of his prayer can lead to a more accurate attentiveness to what God's voice is speaking and how God might be seeking to claim more fully some of the operative motives and transform other ones. The amalgam of motives that stirred as a desire to be a Hero for Christ within a man moving toward ordination might now need to be reconstituted by Christ as a different kind of motivating energy inside of him.

*A second imperative* for priests dealing with the frustrations and disappointments of priesthood is to make a yearly silent, directed retreat. It was my spiritual director in seminary who encouraged me to make such a retreat because it would help me to delve deeper into my interior life with Christ much more than a group retreat would. Only the paired graces of protracted silence and a capable director can assist in this inner journey most effectively. My experiences of Ignatian-style retreats over the years have revealed this to me. In such a retreat, engaging in the Ignatian method of imaginative prayer with a Scripture passage often allows the pray-er to hear and see Christ drawing him toward deeper communion with Christ in ways that even regular prayer throughout the year has not always allowed. The fruits of silent, directed retreats can allow a priest to embrace the reality of his life and his personhood

with greater freedom from regret, resentment, or the desire to have had a different life. This in turn allows the retreatant to discover how to give his life away in a way that is more truly expressive of his real self—the self that God has always known and loved and not the self that he thought he had to become in order to warrant God’s love. Those of you who are familiar with the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola will recognize this grace as the fruit of the First Week of the Exercises, in which the retreatant is called to ponder his or her creatureliness as total gift of love from the Creator. Furthermore, it is from the fundamental acceptance of the Creator’s love that the retreatant can then more fully acknowledge his or her sinfulness, brokenness, and utter need of God’s mercy. This is the all-important sacred gift that keeps the disillusioned Hero from sinking into despair.

Additional retreat graces from God that one can experience on silent, directed retreats can include the ability to recognize and confront some of one’s inner demons, the capacity to receive God’s love more fully, the clarity to see which specific dimensions of one’s current ministry are in sync with God and which are not, the discernment of new types of ministry to which one might be called, and the reaffirmation of Christ’s desire that a man be a priest for God and for God’s People. Only in silence can the intimate voice of Christ be heard inside of us, revealing the love of the Father and the desire of the Father for our lives. Only in silence can the authentic stirrings of the Holy Spirit be recognized and distinguished from other desires that may not really be of God. Likewise, only with a capable director can we gain true insight about what the voice is saying and where the stirrings are leading so that we are not misled by the hurting or disappointed ego energy inside and do not unintentionally move away from what the Father asks of us and needs from us. In commenting on the need for ongoing spiritual formation of priests after ordination, St. John Paul II writes in *Pastores Dabo Vobis* about a priest’s prayer life:

The priest’s prayer life in particular needs to be continually “reformed.” Experience teaches that in prayer one cannot live off past gains. Every day we need not only to renew our external fidelity to times of prayer, especially those devoted to the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours and those left to personal choice and not reinforced by fixed times of liturgical service, but also to

strive constantly for the experience of a genuine personal encounter with Jesus, a trusting dialogue with the Father and a deep experience of the Spirit.<sup>7</sup>

The trinitarian encounter in prayer that St. John Paul describes is perhaps the greatest benefit of a yearly silent, directed retreat. The vividness of prayer experiences on such retreats contains graces for a priest's prayer life throughout the year, especially as he strives to hold on to his noble assent to the call of Christ while enduring the difficulties and disappointments that priestly life can have at times. This kind of prayer gently moves the priest out of the prior ego energy in which the operative questions were: "What do you ask of my life, Lord?" and "How is my life to continue to be given for you?" Now the priest, in the cauldron of anguish and doubt, can begin to discover in his prayer experiences a different question: "Lord, how are you and I to be priests together?" The yearly encounters with deep silence fuel the kind of prayer that can enter this cauldron and not be undone by it.

*The third imperative* in the ongoing spiritual formation of priests is becoming a member of a priestly support group that is willing to engage in true faith sharing, honest self-reporting about one's life and ministry, and silent prayer in communion with each other, perhaps before the Blessed Sacrament. My own experience with Jesus Caritas groups has been a vital source of encouragement and insight regarding priestly life and ministry. Furthermore, my Jesus Caritas experiences have assured me over and over again that the difficulties and struggles I sometimes face are not unique to me. We priests are struggling and dealing with difficulties *together*, and that has made all the difference to me. I cannot describe adequately enough what it feels like every time I have prayed with my brother priests Charles de Foucauld's heroic words of surrender:

Father, I abandon myself into your hands;  
do with me what you will.  
Whatever you may do, I thank you:  
I am ready for all, I accept all.

7. Pope John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, Postsynodal Apostolic Exhortation, no. 72.

Let only your will be done in me,  
and in all your creatures—  
I wish no more than this, O Lord.

Into your hands I commend my soul:  
I offer it to you with all the love of my heart,  
for I love you, Lord, and so need to give myself,  
to surrender myself into your hands without reserve,  
and with boundless confidence,  
for you are my Father.<sup>8</sup>

The key to the successful support group for priests is that each member makes it a top priority and that each member understands the true nature of the gathering—to share faith, hope, and wisdom as priests whose lives are centered in the person of Jesus Christ, the true High Priest. While there need to be wonderful opportunities for the building up of friendship and priestly fraternity within the sessions, the main focus must remain the faith sharing by the members of the group in trust and respect with each other about how and where each one has been feeling in sync with Christ in his priestly life and ministry and how and where each one has not. This allows mutual experiences of disillusionment and doubt to be brought into the light where they are revealed for what they are—invitations for the moments of feeling disconnected to become opportunities for deeper growth in one's relationship with the Lord. At the same time, the sharing in trust and respect about the realities of his priesthood also prevents each man's frustrations and doubts from becoming what they are not—signs that all along he should never have been ordained or that Christ has misled him. During the most difficult times in ministry, there is nothing more healing than the encouragement and support of other priests who, in revealing their own struggles, evidence their deeper fidelity to Christ and thereby summon forth that heroic fidelity from each other.

In a healthy and life-giving support group of priests, the Noble Hero is no longer portrayed as the highly enthusiastic man of intense conviction who feels utterly fulfilled in all that he is doing for Christ and

8. This prayer as well as information about Jesus Caritas communities can be found at <http://www.jesus Caritas.info/>.

for the church. Instead, the Noble Hero has been transformed by the clash between ideals and reality—by the loss of first fervor—into the steadily faithful Servant who continues to offer to the People of God what Christ asks of him. Within a support group of such faithful men, the Hero for Christ is no longer depicted as the handsome and athletic man who speaks with eloquence and certitude in promotional videos about his call from Christ but the scarred Servant whose sometimes unsteady voice speaks of the doubts he has had about his vocation and then, with an even more humbled voice, shares how Christ has reaffirmed his vocation in newer and deeper ways.

### *Finding the Hero's Deeper Stream in the Spiritual Life*

The priest who remains faithful to prayer, engages regularly in spiritual direction, and seeks out the support of healthy, committed priests will be able to find the deeper stream in his spirit that will allow him to navigate more easily through the rough waters of disillusionment and despair. At the same time, the priest will need to be attentive to the ways that God is seeking to bring consolation into his life and to affirm his vocation. There will always be parishioners who appreciate what a priest has to offer and will let him know that. Just when a priest's despair makes him feel like he is only going through the motions of pastoral ministry, there will be a pastoral visit to the sickbed of someone who will grab the priest's hands and express with deep gratitude how much it meant that he came to visit. Just when the priest begins to hear his own preaching sound hollow and perfunctory, there will be a parishioner at the doorway on Sunday after liturgy saying, "Father, in your homily today you said exactly what I needed to hear." Just when a priest becomes enervated by a loss of enthusiasm and zeal, a parishioner will send a card thanking him for all that he does for the parish. These moments of "coincidental grace" can become a new awakening within the priest when it begins to dawn on him that his heroism stems not merely from what he externally does for Christ and for the church but from what Christ seems to be doing through him and for him, even—perhaps especially—when the priest does not feel very heroic. That insight is the key to discovering the deeper stream.

In his book *Falling Upward: A Spirituality of the Two Halves of Life*, Richard Rohr describes the stages that the hero or heroine must pass

through in order to become the truly generative person he or she is meant to be. One of those necessary stages, Rohr remarks, is when the hero or heroine experiences overwhelming difficulty in his or her mission. Rohr states: “He or she ‘falls through’ what is merely *his or her life situation* to discover his or her *Real Life*, which is always a much deeper river, hidden beneath the appearances. Most people confuse their life situation with their actual life, which is an underlying flow beneath the everyday events.”<sup>9</sup> For a priest, this “much deeper river” creates a shift from finding satisfaction in the external successes of ministry to finding consolation in the internal companionship of Christ.

In addition, once the priest enters the “underlying flow” he cannot really ignore its movement when he prays or ponders. It will seek to draw all the operative motives above it down into its current so that what emerges within a man’s heart, mind, and spirit is a desire to be a priest that integrates more fully all that his genuine creatureliness is about—his abilities and his limitations, his noble and his not-so-noble desires, the self-giving and the self-protective drives of his psyche’s archetypes, the celebrated and the concealed intentions that are in his inner life. Furthermore, this discovery of the deeper stream will eventually demand different forms of personal prayer because this integration of his total self is not a self-accomplished feat of attaining measurable results. Prayer will now be done less *for* Christ and more so *with* Christ, who constantly seeks to draw each person more fully into the Father’s embrace and to reveal how the Father sees each of us and what the Father asks of us. Thus, a priest’s prayer life at this time will eventually need to shift away from only the recitation and accomplishment of prayer to include more efforts at listening and cooperating.

Moreover, the priest will discover through this deeper stream that the angst, disillusionment, and discontentment he has been experiencing have meaning and value. They all comprise an experience of sharing in a “paschal death” with Christ. Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* claims that “a coward dies a thousand times before his death, but the valiant taste of death just once.”<sup>10</sup> From the perspective of the paschal mystery, the opposite is actually true, which means that the heroic priest dies

9. Richard Rohr, *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011), 19.

10. *Julius Caesar*, act 1, scene 2, line 32.

many deaths. Ronald Rolheiser describes well the necessity and the experience of paschal deaths for each person drawn into the underlying flow of the spiritual life. In his wonderful and well-received treatise on the fundamentals of Christian spirituality, *The Holy Longing*, Rolheiser traces the elements of the “paschal cycle” that every genuine disciple of Christ will eventually need to recognize and embrace at important transformative moments in his or her life. This paschal cycle involves the Good Friday moment of a death of something inside of us or in our lives that has been very important. This in turn is followed by the resurrection of something new but not yet fully experienced. The experience of the new cannot happen until we pass through a true period of mourning of what has been lost. This is the “forty days after Easter” period. When we can finally let go of what we have lost by letting it bless us (the Ascension moment), then soon the spirit of the new reality will rush into our interiority and enable us to live it out with great joy (the Pentecost moment).<sup>11</sup>

There are many kinds of “paschal deaths” that will occur in each person’s life. Among them Rolheiser lists the following: the death of our youth; the death of our wholeness (accepting that we are broken, limited persons); the death of our dreams (mourning our incompleteness); the death of our honeymoons (our romantic or zealous levels of commitment); the death of idealized notions of our families and our personal histories; the death of certain ideas of God, church, etc.<sup>12</sup> What allows those deaths to become “paschal” and, therefore, redemptive and meaningful is a genuine search for their connection to Christ’s own paschal mystery. The deeper stream will always include the paschal mystery of Christ. By entering this stream the once-enthusiastic-but-untested priest will come to recognize that his idealized image of the priest-Hero-for-Christ now has to die so that he can receive from Christ a “paschal resurrection” of a newer and deeper sense of how he can live his life nobly for Christ as a priest. The experience of this paschal death of the Hero involves true grief, for it comes from the painful experiences of disillusionment, anger, and despair already detailed in this chapter.

11. Ronald Rolheiser, *The Holy Longing: The Search for a Christian Spirituality* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 147–48.

12. *Ibid.*, 148–62.

It is crucial that the prayer life of the priest experiencing a paschal death allows the proper time for grieving and does not seek to gloss it over, circumvent it, or hasten its duration. Instead, hopefully, the priest will bring up what he is experiencing to a spiritual director, who can help the man to identify accurately what he is experiencing and then discover how to express the grief of his “death” in prayer. It is in moments like this that the priest needs to persist in his previous pattern of devotion to the prayer that is expected of him by the church, for healing and strength are found within those practices. In particular, he can experience how the words of the psalms and canticles, which are a part of the Divine Office, take on a certain resonance through what is being expressed. For instance, in the canticle of Hezekiah (Isa 38:10, 12-14) during Tuesday Morning Prayer, Week 2, the once afflicted king describes the despair he once endured:

Once I said:  
 “In the noontime of life I must depart!  
 To the gates of the nether world I shall be consigned  
 for the rest of my years . . .”

My dwelling, like a shepherd’s tent,  
 is struck down and borne away from me;  
 you have folded up my life, like a weaver  
 who severs the last thread.

Day and night you give me over to torment;  
 I cry out until the dawn.  
 Like a lion he breaks all my bones;  
 Day and night you give me over to torment.<sup>13</sup>

In Psalm 77:1-10 (prayed during Wednesday Morning Prayer, Week 2), the psalmist captures well the process of anguish that one experiencing a paschal death needs to endure. It is a process that includes an aching nostalgia for what once was but no longer is. The psalmist’s

13. Because of the frequency and familiarity with which a seminarian or priest prays with the current edition of the Psalms and Canticles in the Liturgy of the Hours, all of the texts from the Liturgy of the Hours in this book are taken from the International Commission on English in the Liturgy translation of *The Liturgy of the Hours* (4 vols.), 1974.

grief then arrives at the important conclusion that his experience of how God works has changed. The psalmist ardently prays:

I cry aloud to God,  
cry aloud to God that he may hear me.

In the day of my distress I sought the Lord.  
My hands were raised at night without ceasing;  
my soul refused to be consoled.  
I remembered my God and I groaned.  
I pondered and my spirit fainted.

You withheld sleep from my eyes.  
I was troubled, I could not speak.  
I thought of the days long ago  
and remembered the years long past.  
At night I mused within my heart.  
I pondered and my spirit questioned.

“Will the Lord reject us forever?  
Will he show us his favor no more?  
Has his love vanished for ever?  
Has his promise come to an end?  
Does God forget his mercy  
or in anger withhold his compassion”?

I said: “This is what causes my grief:  
that the way of the Most High has changed.”

When a priest experiences the pain of rejection or even hostility from the very people he has been trying to serve heroically, great anger and resentment can arise when he experiences the paschal death of the idealized notion he has had of himself as a priest or the idealized notion he has carried about the nature of a parish community. The priest can give prayerful expression to that anger and resentment when he recites in Psalm 35:22-23 (Thursday Morning Prayer, Week 1):

O Lord, plead my cause against my foes;  
fight those who fight me.  
Take up your buckler and shield;  
arise to help me.

The important thing for a priest to recognize at this time in his life is that he cannot avoid the paschal death he must endure. Furthermore, he cannot conclude that this experience of desolation is a sign that God is absent or that his spiritual endeavors up to this point in his life have been a sham. In his *Spiritual Exercises*, St. Ignatius of Loyola offers some wonderful advice on how to negotiate such experiences of desolation. In the First Week of the Exercises, Ignatius offers “Rules for the Discernment of Spirits”; there are fourteen of them.<sup>14</sup> In rule 7, Ignatius describes desolation as the experience of God withdrawing from us “his abundant fervor, augmented love, and intensive grace, [though] he still supplies sufficient grace for our salvation.”<sup>15</sup> Ignatius cautions that when we experience desolation we need to resist the tempting thought that God has abandoned us and instead purposefully consider how God is helping us through the desolation “even if we do not clearly perceive it.”<sup>16</sup>

In commenting on this seventh rule of discernment of spirits, Timothy Gallagher teaches:

Spiritual desolation, when it appears as purely futile process, is especially difficult to bear, and those who undergo it will all the more easily fall prey to its harmful promptings. Through the *consideration* Ignatius proposes, such persons cross the threshold *out* of this spontaneous sense of heavy meaninglessness and *into* awareness that there is, in fact, a God-intended meaning in their experience of desolation.<sup>17</sup>

Gallagher also notes the importance of working through the experiences of desolation and seeing them as threshold moments of growth, not merely as the painful loss of what had been very tangible experiences of consolation.

When humbly and courageously resisted, spiritual desolation becomes, indeed, a crucial spiritual lesson, teaching hope and

14. St. Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola*, trans. George E. Ganss (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1992), 121–25.

15. *Ibid.*, 123.

16. *Ibid.*

17. Timothy M. Gallagher, *The Discernment of Spirits: An Ignatian Guide for Everyday Living* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2005), 95.

guiding the person toward spiritual maturity in ways that spiritual consolation alone could not accomplish. . . . God's loving providence does not include only "half" of our experience—spiritual consolation, yes, spiritual desolation, no—but rather is *always* active in our lives, both in giving spiritual consolation and in permitting us to experience the trial of spiritual desolation. When spiritual consolation is embraced and spiritual desolation resisted, each movement permits its own kind of growth. *Both* are necessary, in the measure God's loving wisdom disposes, and both are, as Ignatius tells us, lessons. Through both, we come to "the full stature of Christ" (Eph 4:13).<sup>18</sup>

What is important to note in this paschal process is that one's grief cannot become regret or rejection of the Hero image that was so energizing at one time. While it may no longer dominate as a compelling image, it is important to note that for the priest at this stage to resist and endure the trials of desolation he will need to draw precisely from the archetypal energy of the Hero that brings forth persistence and fortitude. Therefore, the archetype of the "Hero-priest for Christ" ought to be regarded as a blessing and a wonderful period of tremendous grace from the Lord. Without this acceptance of the Hero's blessing, a man may erroneously conclude that he became a priest for all the wrong reasons and now must depart from ordained ministry. Furthermore, the period of true grief will reveal that the previously acknowledged operative motives for wanting to give one's life for Christ and his church and the pivotal underlying operative motives (which may not have been acknowledged up to that point) are no longer leading to the sense of success and satisfaction they once did; consolation has dissipated. Those motives too ought to be regarded as blessings, however, because they carried the man through all the years that have now led to this pivotal point in his life and in priesthood. Even though a priest will need to let go of some of his previous operative motives, he needs to see them as how the Spirit operated within him in his foundational period of discerning his priestly vocation and then initially living out his priestly life. As St. Thomas Aquinas reminds us, "Grace builds on nature."

18. *Ibid.*, 99–100. How one works through the experience of desolation will be treated more fully in the next chapter.

Therefore, the motives that were a part of a man's inner life at an earlier stage of psychological and spiritual development (whether consciously or unconsciously) can be regarded as avenues of grace, even if those motives do not fully apply any longer.

Andre Papineau captures well the simultaneous experience of continuity and discontinuity that occurs within these liminal, paschal moments of developmental change. This kind of change does not, however, happen smoothly or easily. Papineau writes:

Developmental changes in the adult life cycle . . . [involve] the breaking up or death of one world and the birth of another in relation to self and others. It implies losing ourselves and others in one way and finding them in a new way. Transitions generate a tension between a side of the self that needs to break with the status quo and a side that feels obligated to defend it because it is still identified with it. This tension is best described in the statement, "I am not what I was but I am not *not* what I was either."<sup>19</sup>

Both Papineau and Rolheiser make it clear that all liminal experiences in human growth and spiritual development will involve a painful "letting-go" of what once worked so well, an awkward "in-between" that lacks clarity of self-identity for a while, and then finally a "new beginning" with a new sense of self and inner spirit, but one that keeps elements of the old.

### *"Sublating" the Hero into a New Priestly Archetype*

As painful and necessary as our paschal deaths may be, not everything that "dies" within them is lost forever. We certainly believe that while the flesh-bound incarnation of Christ died on Calvary, the personhood of Jesus did not end. In the resurrection, all that Jesus ever was and would forever be came to life again, but in a new way. Thus we can say that even in the discontinuity of his death, there was an underlying continuity of Christ's living personhood. His resurrected personal

19. Andre Papineau, *Breaking Up, Down, and Through: Discovering Spiritual and Psychological Opportunities in Your Transitions* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 12.

presence was no longer confined by time and space or human finitude; however, it was still the human and divine Jesus of Nazareth, but now Christ the risen Lord. He was fully alive in a manner that could never die again and in a way that was powerfully and universally life-giving to others. Likewise, the Hero within the priest does not fully die in the paschal death of his idealized version of being a noble man for Christ. Instead that heroic drive now takes on a new form, a new perspective on what it means to be a priest, and a new capacity to be that priest for Christ and for the church.

This process of conversion from one stage to another without the prior stage being totally lost is best understood vis-à-vis the process of “sublation,” as proposed by Bernard Lonergan.<sup>20</sup> When delineating the forms of conversion that happen within a person (intellectual, moral, and religious), Lonergan describes the process as a constant course of further and deeper self-transcendence, in which the previous stages of thinking (intellectual), valuing (moral), and believing (religious) are drawn into the next stage.<sup>21</sup> For Lonergan, conversion happens on every level of human consciousness, so it is a psychological, emotional, intellectual, volitional, and spiritual process all at the same time. The dynamic of sublation is key to this integrated conversion because, as Lonergan states, each further stage of self-transcendence “introduces something new and distinct, puts everything on a new basis, yet so far from interfering with the [previous] sublated [stage] or destroying it, on the contrary needs it, includes it, preserves all its proper features and properties, and carries them forward to a fuller realization within a richer context.”<sup>22</sup>

Since spiritual growth is essential to ongoing conversion, it is my contention that Lonergan’s principle of sublation can also be used to explain how an earlier stage of spiritual development is lifted up into a later, more developed stage, without losing all the important features of the earlier stage. Or perhaps, rather than speaking of a spiritual sublation *up into a higher stage*, the better way of stating this is that

20. Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Seabury Press, 1972), 241. The author credits Karl Rahner for the use of the term “sublation” in the manner in which it is applied in this text. Lonergan cites Rahner’s *Hearer of the Word* (Munich: Kösel Publishing, 1963), 40.

21. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 241.

22. *Ibid.*

an earlier stage of spiritual growth at one level of human consciousness is sublated *down into a deeper level* of one's personhood without the graced features of the earlier stage being lost. The point here is that what the Holy Spirit accomplished within a man in the period of his initially fervent and dedicated desire to be a Noble Hero for Christ is not lost, even as that stage of spirituality falls apart. The paschal death of the Noble Hero does not annihilate the graced archetypal energy that rose within a priest for several years. Instead, that honorable and worthy energy must now become sublated by the Holy Spirit.

At this point, it is fitting to see the connection between how the Holy Spirit sublates one stage of archetypal energy into another and how the power of the Holy Spirit transforms bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. Since the Eucharist is a vital part of priestly spirituality, seeing the connection between the ongoing conversion of a priest and the conversion of bread and wine into the real presence of Christ is important. To understand this, let us look at the writing of Michael Stebbins.

Stebbins, a gifted commentator on Lonergan's work, notes that for Lonergan a lower-order reality can be taken up into a higher-order reality without the destruction of the lower-order thing. The lower-order reality, however, can no longer be identified or named as what it once was; it has become sublated into the higher-order thing without being annihilated. Stebbins cites the example of oxygen within a molecule of a blood cell to demonstrate this phenomenon. He explains:

To illustrate my point, a free molecule of oxygen is a thing; but oxygen bonded to a molecule of hemoglobin in one of my red blood cells is no longer a thing, since it is now functioning within a higher-order unity, identity, whole. At the same time, however, the oxygen is no less oxygen; . . . the conjugates or properties of oxygen remain unchanged, even though they are predicated of a higher-order thing. Lonergan refers to this kind of change as "sublation," by which he means that the reality of a lower-order thing is incorporated into the reality of a higher-order thing.<sup>23</sup>

23. J. Michael Stebbins, "The Eucharistic Presence of Christ: Mystery and Meaning," *Worship* 64 (1990): 225–36.

Stebbins goes on to apply this concept of sublation to the process of eucharistic conversion (most often referred to as “transubstantiation”) whereby the lower-order realities of bread and wine are completely transformed into the higher-order realities of the Body and Blood of Christ without losing any of their qualities and characteristics as bread and wine.<sup>24</sup> This is done by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Notably, it is the same power of the Holy Spirit to effect the eucharistic conversion (transubstantiation) of bread and wine that brings about deeper conversion within every human person, including a priest. Through sublation, the Holy Spirit transforms a priest enduring a paschal death into a newly constituted priest—a man who lives and ministers out of the underlying current of a paschal intimacy with Christ. What this means is that the priest, who for so long has been dutifully invoking the epiclesis of the Holy Spirit in the eucharistic prayer for the sublation of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ, ought always to pray for an epiclesis of his inner life so that the Holy Spirit can raise up all that he has been as a Noble Hero *for* Christ into the higher and deeper reality of priesthood whereby he now sees himself and becomes a Faithful Servant *with* Christ. This is the Pentecost moment in the paschal process,<sup>25</sup> whereby a faithful man can emerge from the paschal death of how he once saw himself as a priest and how he had once engaged in ministry for the church and let the Spirit of the new life come rushing into him so that he can now live the resurrected sense of priesthood to which God has led him. This Pentecost experience ushers in the next chapter in a priest’s spiritual biography.

24. Stebbins contends that the eucharistic elements can no longer be identified as bread and wine, for they have ontologically and intelligibly become something infinitely more as the Real Presence of Christ. But they never lose anything of the experiential qualities and characteristics of bread and wine; they still look, taste, smell, and have the texture of bread and wine. This is how Christ’s Body and Blood become sacred food and drink for all of us. *Ibid.*, 228–30.

25. Rolheiser describes well this Pentecost moment; cf., *The Holy Longing*, 147.