

***Twenty-Third Sunday of Ordinary Time  
Thirteenth Sunday After Pentecost (Latin Mass)  
September 4, 2022  
Year of Saint Joseph***

*“Were the Redeemer to descend into a church, and sit in a confessional to administer the sacrament of penance, and a priest to sit in another confessional, Jesus would say over each penitent, ‘Ego te absolvo,’ the priest would likewise say over each of his penitents, ‘Ego te absolvo,’ and the penitents of each would be equally absolved.”*

*(Saint Alphonsus de Liguori, Dignity and Duties of the Priest; Selva p.28)*

What is a Catholic priest? Is he a man or is he something more? What if I told you that today, right now, before your very eyes, I will command God to do something and God will obey me. Please understand; you heard me quite correctly. Your priest, Fr. Saucier, is the only man in the city of Chickasaw and one of three in the city of Prichard who can command God to do something and God obeys. If this seems hard to believe, then we have lost the true meaning of what is a Catholic priest. Today allow me to address this understanding of priesthood, not solely for your benefit, but mainly for my own. As a priest, as your priest, I must be reminded myself what this dignity of priesthood entails so that I may offer to God, myself, and each of you, a reverent, edifying opportunity for the right and proper worship of our God.

With this in mind, let us begin by clearly stating the dignity of the priest comes from his elevated position as God’s ambassador to mankind. A priest is a man, no different by his birth from any other man, yet invited by God to “wed” His Bride, i.e., to dedicate himself completely to His Church. By his ordination, the priest is given a share in the Divine Power of God. For example, the priest has the power to create as God creates. When the priest prays the words of consecration, “Hoc Est Corpus Meum” (This is My Body), Jesus becomes truly present upon the altar in His Eucharistic Body and Blood under the appearances of Bread and Wine. Furthermore, God has breathed His Spirit upon priests giving to each the power He possesses to forgive the sins of his fellow man. Let me repeat that, God has given His power to a priest, a man, to say to another man “Ego te absolvo” (I absolve you) and God, Himself is obliged to obey this command. Such is the power given to a priest.

Yet how do we treat our priests? Saint John Chrysostom once wrote: “he who honors a priest, honors Christ, and he who insults a priest, insults Christ.” He wrote those words to explain a line taken from the Gospel of Saint Luke in which Jesus said: *“He that heareth you heareth me: and he that despiseth you despiseth me: and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me.”* (Luke 10:16). When you look at me, right now, do you see a man who has been given a dignity higher than the angels? No angel has ever been given the power to forgive sins. Do you see a man who, unlike the Blessed Virgin Mary who gave the world the Incarnate God only once, the priest gives Him to his fellow Catholics each and every time he ascends the altar to offer this Holy Sacrifice of Calvary. Do you see and comprehend this when you see myself or any priest? Do I see and comprehend this each time I glance in a mirror? If so, then let us thank God for that grace. If not, then I and I alone am fully to blame.

You may be asking yourself, why am I bringing this to your attention today? The answer is quite simple. As I read, study, reflect and pray, I am forced to question my own understanding of what it means to be a priest. I need to realize, if only a little deeper each day, how great is the responsibility of priesthood. And, more importantly, how much I, and so many others who are priests, need your prayers daily. I cannot stress that enough. Every priest, including myself, need prayers; your prayers. The temptations we experience, the doubting of our abilities, the despair over our weaknesses, the sins we succumb to and commit, all of these every priest must deal with daily. Added with this, the knowledge that a soul might be lost for all eternity due to his, the priest's, negligence. As much as we may want to excuse our priest, as much as I may want to excuse myself, this is not possible. For Saint Bernard addressed this when he wrote of both the dignity of the priest and the failure of one who fails to rise to this dignity. He wrote: "He (a priest) has become an angel of the Lord, and sinning as a priest he sins in heaven." Saint Alphonsus would further write: "He sins in the midst of light, and therefore his sin, as has been said, is a sin of malice: he cannot allege ignorance, for he knows the great evil of mortal sin: he cannot plead weakness, because he knows the means by which, if he wishes, he can acquire strength; if he is unwilling to adopt the means, the fault is entirely his own." Please pray that I, and every priest, will respond daily through the Holy Spirit to be the priests we are called to be; the saintly priests you deserve.