

Old heroes teach eternal values

The Year of the Priest has ended. The need for priests has never been greater. What are the challenges to considering being a priest in today's world? We know the obvious challenges: a hedonistic society, the emphasis on self, a culture that glamorizes self indulgence and on and on.

What is often missing in our reflection on selfless service of others is that there are few role models in the media. I know that I'm really, really dating myself, but when I was a little boy there were a lot of 'celibate heroes' in popular entertainment.

There was the Lone Ranger. He was always my favorite. He had his faithful Indian companion, Tonto, but no female companion. The Lone Ranger stood for selflessness. He wore a mask to conceal his personal identity. There was no ego. He sought and received no reward. Every show would end, after the Lone Ranger had arrested the bad guys or rescued the good guys and gals, with the same line. As he rode off alone, someone would always ask: "Who was that masked man?" And every show would end with someone responding: "That was the Lone Ranger!" And then in the distance you would hear the voice of the radio Lone Ranger (Fran Striker or Brace Beamer, I'm really dating myself) "Hi Yo Silver, Away!" And of course the strains of the William Tell Overture would swell into life.

He did the good deed. He neither asked for nor received anything for himself, other than knowing he had done the good deed.

Batman and Robin were two others of my favorites, originally from the comic books and later from television. Again, Batman by day was apparently a rich individual, but by "night" facing the darkness of crime, he would become a selfless servant of society. If the police needed help, they would flash the bat signal in the sky and Batman would ride to the rescue. Yes, like the Lone Ranger, he had his companion, Robin, but there were no romantic interests. His only interest was serving the common good at great personal expense.

A third major hero was Superman. He was from another planet. With super powers, instead of self-aggrandizing, seeking all the pleasure and wealth and power for

himself, Superman put his powers at the service of others. True, Lois Lane had some romantic interest in Superman, but he seemed to have no similar interest in her. He was interested only in devoting his time to doing good, defeating evil, and doing what was good for the common good.

I watch essentially no television at all. I'm the last to know what's being portrayed on television today. My hunch is that it is more of the same - more violence, more sex, more selfishness.

I think our young people are starved for heroes - true heroes, who put their egos aside and seek the good of others.

I realize that the heroes of the 1940's and 50's were popular because we had just finished a world war, in which countless thousands of young men gave their last ounce of blood putting the good of the country above their own lives.

Have we honored the lives they gave by living the lives we are living? They gave their lives for a noble purpose. Do we serve each other with similar nobility?

Our society is a society of thrills and excitement - the next video game or movie or sporting event. But for all the thrills there does not seem to be an equal amount of happiness.

The old heroes seem to have had their thrills from defeating evil, from striving for excellence, from serving others, from putting the common good before their own good. The old heroes can teach us eternal values. If such male celibate heroes are lacking in today's media, perhaps they can reappear in today's priests!