

# Priest as spiritual father and companion

“Spiritual Father” is perhaps the most common title used today to describe a Roman Catholic ministerial priest. It’s also the most comprehensive, all-embracing description of what a priest is expected to be and do as he prolongs the life-giving presence of Christ among us.

Like the father of every family, he is associated with the beginning of life: He is the ordinary minister of the sacrament of baptism whereby the Father’s spirit which dwelt in Jesus comes to dwell within us, giving us a share in God’s triune life.

In the Eucharist, he is responsible for providing nourishment for that spirit as we grow in faith and hope and love; this he does by proclaiming and interpreting sacred Scripture, as he leads us in celebrating the sacrament which we call “blessed” *par excellence*.

When we fail, out of weakness or sin, to reverence and treasure the life Christ entrusted to us, the priest is there to reunite us to God and to Christ’s church through the healing sacrament of repentance and reconciliation. When we stand before the altar next to the one we love, pledging life-long fidelity in marriage, the priest is there to witness our desire to share life with the one we love, so that we can bring new life into existence and care for that life.

When sickness and suffering descend upon us and oppress us, body and soul, the priest is there to anoint us so that we can enter more intimately into Christ’s Passion; this enables our hearts to become serene as we recognize the salvific significance of our suffering.

But the ministerial priest is also a companion in our pilgrimage of faith. He too must walk in darkness trustfully, moving from clarity to clarity. He does not have all the answers; he too is a seeker. When we survey the world surrounding us, our conscience is awakened to many ways in which we can relate to others more justly as we seek to respond to their needs. The priest, like each of us, must discern how to

give primacy to God in all relationships.

What does it mean to live simply in a world dominated by competitiveness and consumerism? How can we give priority to persons in a time of economic decline and recession? Because the priest knows himself to be a pardoned sinner, he can assure others that even our failures and limitations may serve to bring us back to God. In his effort to be docile in obeying his bishop and to live and work in harmony with his fellow priests, the priest can honestly support us in our humble efforts to live and work with others in promoting justice and peace.

In brief: The priest's very presence is a reminder that the sacred deserves to have an honored place in the drama of this world. By word and witness, he invites us to experience the beauty and joy of living in communion with Jesus, as part of his church, following the example of Mary, his mother.

As father and companion, the priest enables us gratefully to enjoy intimate communion with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in evangelizing our world.

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