

FROM THE 'MANUALE SACERDOTIS'

JOHN MIRK¹**How a priest ought frequently to call to mind his holy vocation**

WHEN the Apostle saw the perilous life of priests he spoke to them saying: Look to your vocation, brethren. This as if he had said openly: Love that which you are now neglecting and do that to which you are called. Therefore, most dear one, obey the command of the apostle, often calling to mind your vocation, realizing deeply that God has chosen you for his priest and called you, not to uncleanness, but to glory. Thus you will be holy, innocent, clean, divorced from sinners and more blessed than the angels. Jesus Christ has called you to such heights of dignity and virtue in order that you may serve him in holiness and justice all the days of your life. And after these days he will offer you your reward and will give you eternal joy.

Do not think little of your reward nor become tired of your work, as do those who, after they have received the priesthood, are sorrowful, for these do their office with murmuring and in labour. But as you have received the priesthood with a joyful mind, fulfil it with one no less joyful. Do not be of the number of those of whom the Apostle has said: Do not murmur as some of those murmured and perished by the serpent.

Remember that you are not merely made holy by the anointing with Holy Oil. It is by a holy body and soul that you must be sanctified, for the holiness of the priestly office requires a holy minister. You have been anointed with the oil of rejoicing that you may give your service with happiness of heart and joy of spirit. For the Lord requires joyful devotion from his priest that he may bless him at all times: the priest should show himself a cheerful giver of his service, for such the Lord loves. The Lord loves, not forced, but willing service. Hence the Psalmist says: Gladly will I sacrifice to thee, O Lord. When the Lord sees him giving willing service, he fills him with the merits of all good works.

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¹ Canon Regular of Lilleshall, A.C. 1400. Translated from an original MS by Fr A. E. Wallis Bull, C.R.L.

Since the work of a priest consists mainly in the heart and the voice, all holy priests should daily offer up the first fruits of heart and tongue to God. Hence St Augustine says: Sacrifice daily to God the first use of heart and voice.

When he rises in the morning the good priest offers with outstretched hands his heart to God and cries with suppliant voice saying: *Deus in nomine tuo salvum me fac*, etc., repeating this psalm three times with the same number of *Pater noster* and *Ave Maria*. Hence Hilary of Poitiers says: While you are rising from your bed and before you begin your prayers, say this psalm—*Deus in nomine tuo salvum me fac*—three times and the same number of *Pater noster* and you will have no difficulties that day.

When he begins the psalm the priest should fortify himself with the sign of the Cross, for he who loves the Crucifix often guards himself with its sign. Jerome says to Eustochius: on every deed and movement let your hand print the sign of the Cross. So also the hymn sings: *Crux pellit omne crimen, fugiunt crucem tenebre*. Dedicated with such a sign the mind knows no wandering.

After signing himself and reciting these psalms and prayers, let the priest say with humble devotion:

O Lord Jesus Christ, I give thanks to thee
 who hast guarded, protected and visited thine
 unworthy servant this night, allowed him to
 come to this hour whole, healthy and safe.
 I give thanks also for all thy other great
 benefits which thou hast bestowed upon me
 in thy great goodness alone, who livest and
 reignest, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

You also, most dear one, love not your bed overmuch but cast sleepiness and sloth far from you. Ambrose says: It is unfitting for a Christian to be found in his bed by the rays of the sun. If this be unfitting for a Christian, how much more so for a priest who is the servant of God.

Rise therefore early that you may be able to offer your first fruits at a fitting time to God. For if you are eager to serve God, he will be eager to serve you. And thus you will be able to say with the psalmist: *Quam Dominus sollicitus est mei*. For the words of the apostle are: Cast all your cares, my brethren, into the hands of him who has ever care for us.