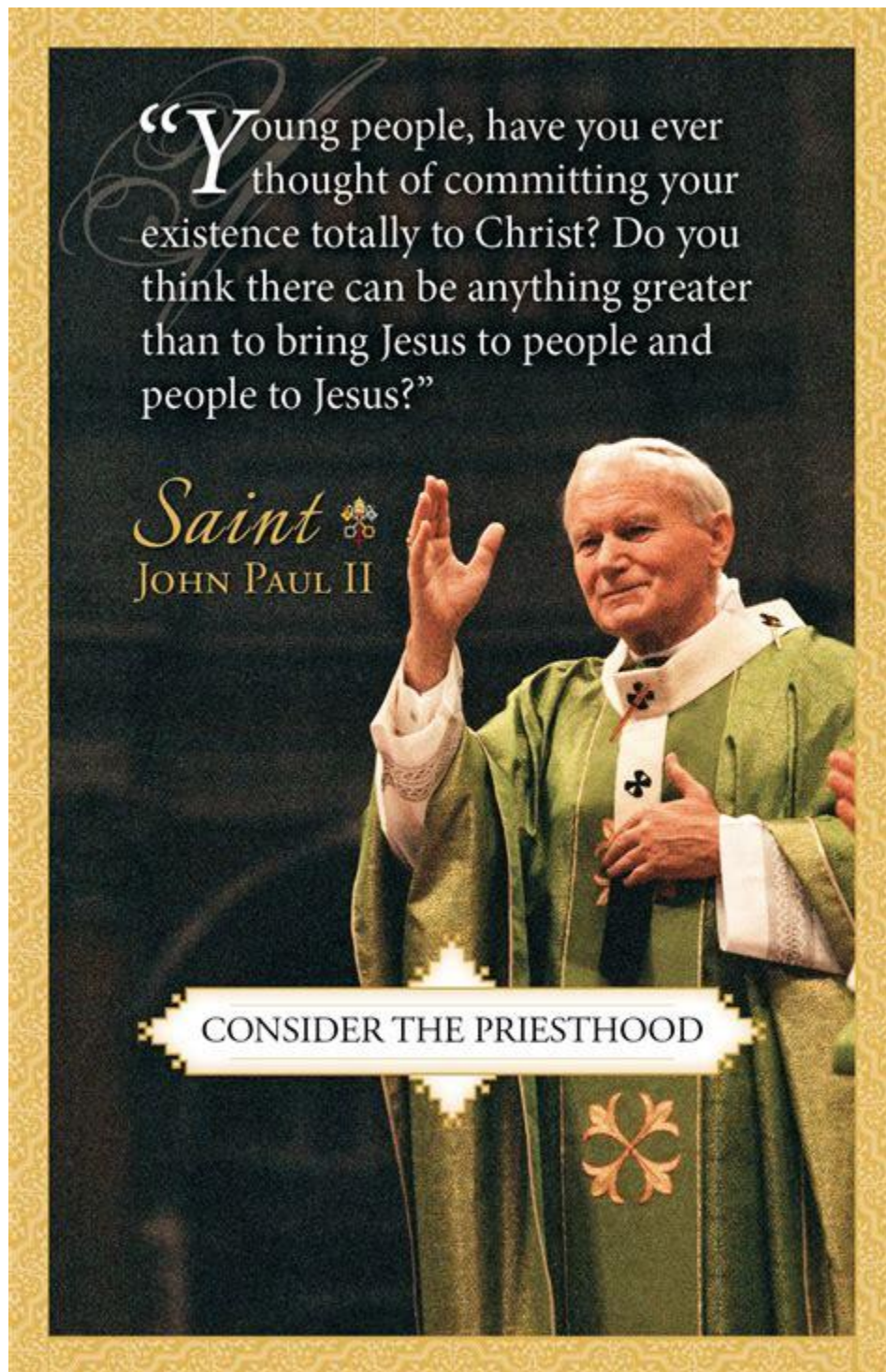


FROM FATHER JOHN: "Every high priest is taken from among men and made their representative before God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. ... No one takes this honor upon himself but only when called by God, just as Aaron was." (Hebrews 5:1, 4)



The Convocation of Priests of the Diocese of Joliet is scheduled for this upcoming week which means I will be out of the parish Monday through Friday of this week. The convocation is called by the Bishop of the Diocese, and, in our diocese, it is held every other year. All the priests of the diocese are required to attend.

The convocation gathers the priests of the diocese together for prayer, for the sacraments of the Eucharist, Penance and Reconciliation and the Anointing of the Sick, for business meetings and for social time to build

priestly fraternity and camaraderie. It is part retreat, part priestly fraternity and part business. You may be wondering why the bishop calls a convocation and requires all the priests who are active in our diocese to attend. Why have a convocation, why do priests need to go off together as a Presbyterate (The Presbyterate are all those priests ordained for and/or serving in the Diocese of Joliet)?

Pastores Dabo Vobis (I will Give You Shepherds), an encyclical written by Pope St. John Paul II, defines the priest's relationship with Christ as fundamental to the priesthood of each priest. It is at the core of the priesthood and defines who the priest is as a human person. The priest is united to "*Christ the High Priest and Good Shepherd*." (no.11) Pope St. John Paul II goes on to state "*the priest is configured to Jesus Christ as Head and Shepherd of the Church*." (no.21)

It is clear throughout this document that the priesthood is essentially communitarian beginning with the relationship to Christ. The communitarian nature of the priesthood then extends outward in the relationship that the priest has with the Church, the Presbyterate and the laity. John Paul II writes that "*Each priest, whether diocesan or religious, is united to the other members of this Presbyterate on the basis of the Sacrament of Holy Orders and by particular bonds of apostolic charity, ministry and fraternity. All priests in fact, whether diocesan or religious, share in the one priesthood of Christ the Head and Shepherd; 'they work for the same cause, namely, the building up of the Body of Christ'*". (no.17)

The threefold office of priest, prophet and king is a theological principle in the documents of the Second Vatican Council beginning with *Lumen Gentium*, with *Presbyterorum Ordinins* and continuing with post-conciliar documents such as *Pastores Dabo Vobis*. Everything in the priest's life and ministry originates with Christ but then is expressed in the role of the priest as priest, prophet or king. There is an organic integration of these three offices.

Although *Lumen Gentium* (no. 25) and *Presbyterorum Ordinins* (no. 4) both hold preaching, which is the role of the prophet, as preeminent, they also maintain the importance of all three offices. The council wanted to liberate the theology of the priesthood from a narrow, purely cultic theology to one that embraced the broader biblical and patristic understanding of the priesthood.

The Presbyterate thus appears as a true family, as a fraternity, whose ties do not arise from flesh and blood but from the grace of Holy Orders. This grace takes up and elevates the human and psychological bonds of affection and friendship, as well as the spiritual bonds which exist between priests. It is a grace that grows ever greater and finds expression in the most varied forms of mutual assistance; both spiritual and material. Priestly fraternity excludes no priests. However, it can and should have its preferences, those of the Gospel, reserved for those who have greatest need of help and encouragement.

This fraternity "*takes special care of the young priests, maintains a kind and fraternal dialogue with those of the middle and older age groups, and with those who for whatever reasons are facing difficulties; as for those priests who have given up this way of life or are not following it at this time, this brotherhood does not forget them but follows them all the more with fraternal solicitude*."

The Convocation is an important part of our priestly "family life". It brings us all together so that we, as a Presbyterate, as brothers, can share our lives, our hopes, our dreams, our priestly love for one another, the sacraments, and the challenges we face in our ministry.

May God Bless you and all those who love the Lord.