

TO BE A PRIEST!

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I.

PLANNING ONE'S FUTURE.

What Shall I Be?

IT is natural for every boy to dream about his future. From the time he attains to the use of reason there is scarcely a stage in his early years when he is not asking himself: What shall I be when I grow up? Or, What will I do when I leave school? And there are few boys who have not fondly entertained thoughts of a dozen different possible careers in turn, one enthusiasm giving way to another as they read of the various walks in life open to men.

Towards the end of his life at school or college a greater sense of responsibility develops. He realises that a definite choice must soon be made and that his choice is quite likely to prove a life-sentence. To take one track is to renounce other tracks, and the track chosen may have to be seen through to the end. An important decision has to be made.

Probably that decision will depend upon one's attraction towards a particular kind of work, and the conviction that one can do it well and thus make a success of life. But there is more to be considered than one's own personal satisfaction and success.

Social Duty.

ONE of the first things that strikes us is that we are not the only individuals on the face of the earth. Man is a social being and cannot live for himself alone. There are others to be considered. Again and again selfishness must give way to the interests of others. A boy who has had any home training at all has learned something of devotedness to the needs of his parents and other members of the family. As he grows older he notices that the whole nation is built on mutual service.

The work of each citizen is a contribution towards the welfare of others. The teacher supplies education to the young; the farmer provides food without which multitudes would starve; the engineer constructs roads and bridges and all kinds of works of great use to the country; the doctor attends to the health of the community; the lawyer to the legal privileges of its members; the politician to the good of the nation as a whole.

This aspect of life brings to the mind of every boy not dead to all the finer characteristics of his human nature thoughts of a career in which he will not only find happiness and profit for himself, but in which at the same time he will be able to do the greatest amount of good for his fellow-men.

The Will of God.

HOWEVER, not all has yet been said. We are not pagans. We are Christians. And as Christians we wish above all things to fulfil God's Holy Will during our earthly lives. Some thought, then, must be given to His possible plans for us. We know that God has called some people to serve Him in special ways. We know that God has already called us to serve Him as Christians, rising above the level of others even in the ordinary duties of life.

Our Lord said, "I must preach the Kingdom of God, for therefore am I sent" (Lk. IV. 43). No cause in this world compares with that of Christ in majesty of outlook, splendour of purpose, and eternal consequences. And all Christians are called up to co-operate with Our Lord's work to some degree in virtue of their very baptism. There is not a Christian, therefore, who should not pause to think in what line of life he can best secure, not only his own happiness and prosperity, not only better opportunities of civic and social service, but also the promotion of the interests of Christ.

But does God want even more than that? We know that God gives quite different vocations to different people. He does not call all by the same road. Perhaps He intends us to remain as good Catholics in ordinary fields of human endeavour. Perhaps He does not. We must try to find out.

When we look at the different roads ahead of us, some of them may appeal to us very much. But we should not take a road just because we like it. In the end the most important thing in life is God's Holy Will, and we should pray to know what He intends us to be, pleading earnestly with St. Paul, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"

II. NOBLEST CHOICE OF ALL.

Dignity of the Priesthood.

WHEN Our Lord gives a boy the grace of a vocation to the Priesthood, He calls him to the noblest career open to man. He invites him to the highest happiness, to a life more useful to his fellow-men than any other, and to duties that contribute most to the glory of God. To choose to be a Priest, therefore, is the noblest choice of all. And it is our own choice, as we shall see later, even though Our Lord must give us the opportunity to make it. Here let us dwell upon its nobility.

There is no title to any honour so ancient, so lawful, so glorious as that of the Catholic Priesthood. The most learned Doctors of the Church, with all their erudition, and the Saints lifted to the heights of contemplation, have employed all their eloquence to do justice to the dignity of such a vocation, whilst the faithful of every age have held the Priesthood in the highest reverence and esteem.

For a Priest is one who has been called by the Son of God to be His special friend, His ambassador, even His "other Self." The Priest is set apart from the rest of humanity, and by his vocation lifted above all merely local and earthly interests. His country and his family will henceforth be the Church, the Kingdom of Christ on earth. He takes his place in the long line of Priests, drawn from every nation, becoming a companion of the Apostles, of the Martyrs, of the Doctors and Geniuses and Saints who have graced that same vocation through the centuries.

A Wonderful Mission.

To His Priest Our Lord entrusts the treasures of His temple, above all that most precious treasure, the Sacrament of His very Body and Blood. Leaving his own home to follow Christ, wherever it is possible to erect an Altar and consecrate the Body and Blood of Christ, there henceforth the Priest will be at home. And towards all men he is filled with universal charity. Everyone with a soul is his interest. As a Priest of the Most High God, he holds the price of the redemption of the world in his hands. What, then, is the Priest to men? Through him they receive heavenly and spiritual treasures; through him they have access to the God of Mercy; through him eternal salvation is made possible to them; and they bless the day the Priest who helps them corresponded with his vocation.

"To live in the midst of the world without wishing its pleasures," writes Father Lacordaire "to be a member of each family, yet belonging to none; to share all sufferings; to penetrate all secrets; to heal all wounds; to go from men to God and offer Him their prayers; to return from God to man to bring pardon and hope; to have a heart of fire by charity and a heart of bronze by chastity; to teach, console, and bless always; my God, what a life; and it is yours, O Priest of Jesus Christ."

There is no higher vocation in life than to be devoted to the eternal glory of God and the spiritual good of man; nor can one confer a greater benefit even on this world than to work at the heart of life and change men from within. Yes, he makes the noblest choice who chooses to be a Priest.

III. ORIGIN OF THE PRIESTHOOD.

THE Priesthood is a favour bestowed upon this world by God and inspired by His immense love for poor humanity. We know that God created us in the first place that we might be the object of His love, and love Him in return. Even when man rebelled, instead of abandoning the wretched creature and withdrawing into eternal silence, as we would have felt inclined to do, God so loved the world as to give His only-begotten Son. And that Son, in turn, to continue His work for the redemption of humanity, created the Priesthood.

There was, of course, a priesthood amongst the Jews before the coming of Christ. But that priesthood was merely a type of His, just as the chosen people of Israel were a type of the Church Our Lord established, and as their sacrifices a type of the Sacrifice He was to offer on the Cross, and continue in the Mass till the end of time.

It was, then, for the perpetuation of His own priestly work on earth that Our Lord communicated His Own

Priesthood to the Apostles He Himself chose, empowering them to hand it on to others in their turn.

To the Apostles He gave His Own mission. "As the Father hath sent Me," He said, "I also send you." (Jo. XX, 21.) He conferred upon them a more than human power, breathing upon them and saying, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." (Jn. XX, 22.) He gave them His Own authority to teach, bidding them go "into the whole world and preach the Gospel to every creature." (Mk. XVI, 15.) They were to rule in the Church. "Whatsoever you shall bind upon earth," He said, "shall be bound also in Heaven, and whatsoever you shall loose upon earth, shall be loosed also in Heaven." (Matt. XVIII, 18.) After instituting the Sacrifice of the Mass at the Last Supper He bade them, "Do this in commemoration of Me." (I Cor. XI, 24.) And His Own power to destroy sin He gave them when He said, "Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them." (Jn. XX, 23.)

The Catholic Priesthood, then, is not a mere type or shadow of the eternal Priesthood of Christ, as was that of the Jews. The Catholic Priest has the very Priesthood of Christ imparted to him. The power delegated to him comes from Christ Himself, and he offers the self-same Sacrifice. Being always with the Church as He promised, it is Our Lord Himself Who, through the Bishops, still confers His Priesthood upon each recipient of Holy Orders; and the characteristic worship of the New Law depends upon the very Priesthood of Christ, which is the glory of the Church and essential to her existence.

IV. PRIESTLY CELIBACY.

Law of the Church.

IT is the law of the Catholic Church that the young man who desires to be a Priest must renounce all prospects of marriage, and of the human love and affection that prepare the way for it. By the vow of chastity the Priest binds himself by a new obligation before God to live a single life, observing all the requirements of the virtue of purity in thought, word, and deed.

Many non-Catholics have been deeply impressed by this law of celibacy, by which those who wish to become Priests are obliged to renounce marriage. It is an obligation which is, of course, gladly and willingly undertaken for the greater glory of God. And the celibacy of the Catholic Priesthood does give greater glory to God and edification to men. In his book, "The Path Which Led a Protestant Lawyer to the Catholic Church," Mr. Peter Burnett gives the celibacy of the Priesthood as one of the reasons for his conversion. "I found upon examination," he wrote, "that the Catholic clergy made far greater personal and worldly sacrifices than the Protestant. They dedicate themselves to the ministry exclusively; they give up all temporal hopes; they debar themselves from marriage; they come under the commands of superiors; they go to the uttermost bounds of the earth when required; and they devote their whole lives to the single performance of their duties." (P. 246.)

The will of the Church in this matter is in accordance with the express wishes of Christ Himself. In speaking to the Apostles on the subject of marriage, He told them that there would be those whose ideals would inspire them to renounce it for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. (Matt. XIX, 11-13.) St. Paul himself led a life of celibacy, and said, "I would that all men were even as myself, but every one has his own proper gift of God. (I Cor. VII, 7.) And he gives the reason constantly urged by the Church in favour of the celibacy of her Priests: "He that is without a wife is solicitous for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please God. But he that is with a wife is solicitous for the things of the world, how he may please his wife; and he is divided." (I Cor. VII, 32.)

Noble Ideals.

THE Church wants her Priests to give their undivided attention to the duties of their vocation. She declares that the Catholic Priest must be the perfect priest as opposed to the imperfect priesthood of the Old Testament, even as he is the teacher of the loftier, supernatural, spiritual mysteries of the New Law. Even as he offers the Sacrifice of the Mass, the highest form of worship ever demanded by God, so he himself must be a vessel of election, removed from ordinary use and as consecrated as the chalice he holds in his hands. Charged with immense mediation between Heaven and earth, surely the Priest should be given wholeheartedly to prayer and free from domestic cares. Then, too,

in his relations to the faithful, the Priest must have a universal zeal and charity, giving himself to all according to their needs, and belonging to none. Could the Church do less than claim her Priest exclusively for Christ?

How many men there are who have abstained from marriage for perfectly natural motives! Finding the responsibilities of marriage incompatible with wholehearted devotion to a cause that has absorbed them, explorers, scientists, musicians, philosophers, artists, and specialists of all kinds have found themselves without interest in a state the average man normally desires. Are his higher motives less powerful and absorbing for the Priest?

The one great theme of a Priest's life is the love of God and zeal for souls. So powerful are these interests that they loosen all other ties, whether of blood or of affection, or of rank or of nationality. He clears everything else away, leaving all aside that makes up the existence of other people, so that he may concentrate on the one object of his life: the fitting worship of God and the salvation of the souls of His people.

And there is not a Catholic heart which does not say that so it should be. Certainly the boy to whom God gives the desire to be a Priest finds the craving for the consolation of a created and human love robbed of any power over him that it might ever have possessed.

Such, then, is celibacy, the honour of the Priesthood, the joy of the faithful, and an immense source of influence in the Catholic Church.

V.

THE WORK OF A PRIEST.

Worship and Prayer.

AFTER our glimpse of what a Priest is, let us give a few thoughts to the work he has to do. We have seen that Our Lord gave to His Apostles His Own mission. "As the Father hath sent Me," He said to them, "I also send you." That is the mission inherited by the Catholic Priest.

His first duty is, of course, to dedicate himself to the worship of God. It is true that the Eternal Son of God was made man and lived and died "for us men and for our salvation," as the Nicene Creed says. But that is not the whole truth, nor the most important part of it. The most important aspect of Our Lord's Priesthood was its complete consecration to the honour and glory of God. He summed up His life in the words, "Father, I have glorified Thee on earth," and He tells us that "the Father seeks those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth." The main duty of the Priest, therefore, is to offer fitting acknowledgment and worship to God. And as religious duties are so neglected by the mass of mankind, with all the more fervour the Priest must devote himself to the eradication of this great injustice.

The chief duty of a Priest is to offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. When Our Lord instituted the Blessed Sacrament at the Last Supper, He said to the Apostles not only "Do this in commemoration of Me," but also, "As often as you do it you shall show forth the death of the Lord until He come." And it is by the Mass that the prophecy of Malachy is fulfilled, "From the rising of the sun even to the going down, My Name is great among the Gentiles; and in every place there is sacrifice, and there is offered to My Name a clean oblation." (Mal. I, 11.)

Speaking of the value of the Mass, Archbishop Walsh, of Dublin, said: "If all the prayers of all loving hearts from the beginning of the world, and all the seraphic worship of the thrones and principalities in Heaven, and the burning love and devotion of the Virgin Mother of God, and the million voices of the universe, of all creatures of Heaven, earth, and sea, were offered up in one harmonious act of praise and adoration, they would not equal, or even approach in value and efficacy the infinite worth of a single Mass."

The very thought of this duty of offering the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass must surely impress the heart and soul of every Catholic boy, whether he feels called to the Priesthood or not; and profoundly indeed the heart and soul of one who does aspire to the Altar.

"If we knew what the Mass is," one has said who loved it exceedingly, "we should die, yes, of joy and gratitude; for there, that which was the desire of the Patriarchs, and was foreseen by the Prophets, of which the shepherds at Bethlehem, the Apostles at the Last Supper, Mary and the holy women on Calvary, and at the holy Sepulchre, the Disciples after the Resurrection, were witnesses, we see ourselves today."

But it is by means of the priest Who stands there at the Altar, and who was obedient to the long series of graces and

inspirations that went to make up his vocation, that the Mass is possible. What a loss had he not corresponded with those graces!

Besides this great duty of offering the Sacrifice of the Mass, the priest must be a man of prayer at all other times; and more particularly at set times appointed by the Church. At his ordination to the sub-diaconate, every priest has had the Breviary put into his hands, together with the grave obligation to make its prayers his own, offering them in the name of the whole Church. By his fervent recitation of the Breviary the priest offers the sacrifice of praise, glorifying God on earth as a prelude to heaven itself. The priest lends his lips to the Church that she may express her gratitude for two thousand years of Divine assistance and protection and that she, as their spiritual mother, may pray on behalf of those of her children who give so little time to prayer themselves, or pray so badly when they do give their attention to the duty.

To Teach and to Sanctify.

THE third duty of the priest is to preach the Gospel. "God so loved the world as to give His only-begotten Son" that "whosoever believes in Him may not perish." By his very vocation a priest is set aside to carry to men this Gospel of which God is the source and Christ the theme.

Of Himself Christ said, "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." (Lk. XIX, 10.) And to His priest He says: Go in My name, to fight My enemies and save souls from eternal disaster. Tell them I exchanged heaven for earth to lift them from earth to heaven; that I died to destroy their death; that I rose from death to life and ascended into heaven to prepare for them an eternal happiness. Go. Preach this Gospel, convert souls to the Church I established, preserve those who already belong to it, and win them all to their eternal salvation.

But not only must the priest teach the truth in the name of his Divine Master. He must sanctify those whom he converts by the administration of the Sacraments. As a spiritual father he must do all for the spiritual life that earthly fathers do for the temporal lives of their children. After having given life in Christ to souls at the baptismal font, he must help them to grow in their knowledge of Christian doctrine and encourage them in the fulfilment of their Christian duties. Should they yield to the stress of temptation and fall into sin it is for him to bind up their wounds and heal them, dispensing to them the Precious Blood of Christ in the Sacrament of Penance. At his feet they kneel to be nourished with the Bread of Life in Holy Communion. They come for his blessing upon their marriages; and when each one's turn comes to go out of this world, it is the priest who is at their death-bed, soothing their last hours, allaying their fears, and consoling them as no others could do.

Heavenly Joy.

THERE is not a faithful priest who will not look upon a multitude of souls in heaven some day who owe their eternal happiness to his work on earth. "Could the priest but glimpse the Beatific Vision," writes Noel M. Wilby, "he would see associated with him there those he loved best all his life long—mother, father, kindred, and dearest friends. Round him would be clustered those chosen souls whose friendship, care, or dependence had strengthened his whole spiritual life; little children who had received their first Holy Communion from his hands; wise old men; white-souled youth; valiant-hearted women and clear-eyed girls; smiling innocent babies; fellow priests; heroic sufferers. Memories would crowd upon him, of converts, rescued sinners, the faithful, chance-met wayfarers who had crossed his path but once and vanished again; inquirers who had learnt something of the faith and then gone away again, undecided; many souls completely unknown to him. But in all these souls he would see the light of eternal glory, understanding inexplicably that his unworthy ministrations had helped them to God."

Surely such a life commends itself to every boy with a spark of Catholic faith as one glorious to God and of the utmost use to men; as one into which he could gladly put his whole heart, if such were indeed his vocation.

But how can one know that such is his vocation? Who are called to such a life? What are the signs by which one can judge that he should volunteer to serve God as a priest? That we shall see later on.

VI. WHAT IS A VOCATION?

All Should Know.

YEARS ago, Cardinal Vaughan expressed astonishment that the Catholic laity should know so little about vocations to the priesthood and give so little attention to a subject of such vital importance to the Church. Surely, he remarked, when Our Lord said, "Pray the Lord of the harvest that He send labourers into His vineyard," He was bidding all His followers to occupy themselves with this matter. Above all, it must be remembered that the furnishing of the Church with priests is largely within the power of Catholic parents, whose prayers can win vocations for their own sons, who can train them in the necessary dispositions, and who should be able to explain to their enquiring children the signs of a vocation and in what it consists.

Exaggerations.

IN the first place, in discussing the nature of a vocation to the priesthood, it is necessary to avoid two extremes.

One extreme would be to imagine that, since a vocation comes from God, the boy who wishes to become a priest must experience a strong and unmistakable urge from within to embrace the priestly life.

The other extreme would be to think that no desire to be a priest is necessary at all.

It is true that, in 1912, the Church sanctioned the teaching that the vocation to the priesthood is conferred by the bishop at the moment of ordination, and that any young man has the right to present himself who has a "right intention" and has been judged by the authorities the sanctuary. God gave them the light to see how empty are the things of this world. What made others happy did not make them happy. Moreover, they were filled with an appreciation of heavenly and eternal things. Their hearts were drawn to love God only, and their wills were moved to choose to serve Him alone. There was never a time when they did not desire to become priests. Never were they in any doubt as to what God was calling them to be. But this type of vocation is also rare. It is not necessary, and the fact that one has not had a similar experience is no sign whatever that he has not a true interior vocation to the priesthood.

Putting aside, therefore, these special vocations, to look for which would be expecting far too much of normal boys, let us turn to the usual signs by which a vocation to the priesthood may be discerned.

The Ordinary Way.

WHEN a country is at war and men are needed for its defence, the Government may secure recruits for the army either by compulsion or by calling for volunteers. If the latter method is chosen, those who love their country sufficiently to rise above their own selfish interests, their love of comfort, and their dread of hardship and danger, will enlist. They answer the invitation, call, or vocation offered them by their country, and they do so by their own choice. But not all who do volunteer will necessarily be accepted. Only those really suitable are selected. Some may be too young. Others may not have the health to pass the medical examination. Yet others may have obligations in civil life which the authorities think they should not abandon. So, out of the many who respond to the appeal, some only are chosen.

Now, Our Lord has chosen the volunteer method in order to secure priests who will devote themselves to the interests of His' cause. He commanded the Church to preach the Gospel to all nations, even to the uttermost parts of the earth. But He does not command all members of the Church to become priests and Apostles, in the strict sense of the world. He asks volunteers from amongst those who are free and fit for such a duty. And that is sufficient invitation to all who have the necessary qualifications.

Accepting the Invitation.

WHAT are the necessary qualifications? The invitation avails for every boy who is free from canonical impediments (as most boys are), who has ordinary bodily health and mental ability, and who is faithful to the religious duties expected of good Catholic laymen.

I do not say that every Catholic boy who could pass those tests "has a vocation." But he has the qualities necessary,

and he could make the general invitation his own vocation, if he had the goodwill.

Reflecting on Our Lord's words, "I am come to cast fire on the earth, and what will I but that it be enkindled" (Lk. XII, 49), together with His insistence on prayer that labourers be sent into the vineyard, he hears in them the appeal, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And he answers with Isaias, "Lo, here am I. Send me." (Is. VI, 8.) He can say, with Our Blessed Lady, "Be it done to me according to Thy word." (Lk. I, 38.) "I cannot give Our Lord my blood," he will think, "but my soul, my work, my prayers, my life—yes, I can give Him another self for the redemption of souls."

The desire to do this, the fruit of our own generosity prompted by Divine grace, is our own personal and interior vocation. It does not arise from any clear and positive inspiration, as with those who receive an extraordinary special call. The desire may arise within us because we have been impressed by the example of some good priest, or because friends have suggested that we should think of such a choice; or it may be prompted by the reading of a book on the subject (even of this little book); or, again, it may be the fruits of our own prayers, or of the prayers of our parents for us. But, however, it arises, such a desire is a sign in advance of a true vocation to the priesthood.

A Test Case.

CERTAINLY if a boy came to me who had physical health and average mental ability, whose moral life was that of the normal good Catholic, and who said that he was thinking of becoming a priest in order to work for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, I would tell him that his very thought to embrace such a state of life was an initial call from God, a true vocation which would justify him in applying to the bishop through his parish priest, or to the superiors of any Religious Order which might appeal to him.

Whether he possessed the necessary physical, mental, and moral qualities in a sufficient degree, and whether his desire was sufficiently deep and lasting, would be decided by the Seminary authorities during his preparatory years of study.

If he satisfies these authorities, there is not the slightest doubt that a bishop will actually call him in the name of the Church to be ordained a priest. And the fact that he has to wait for that "external" call from the bishop in no way excludes his possession long in advance of a true "interior" vocation to present himself as an aspirant to the priesthood, applying for admission to the Seminary with the determination to do his utmost to fit himself for the actual call to Holy Orders.

In the light of all this, must it not be said that far more boys could become priests than actually do so? Through wrong ideas on the subject, and perhaps through expecting God to manifest that He wants them by signs far beyond any that He normally gives, ever so many Catholic young men, who could have become priests and accomplished so much for God and for souls, are literally wasting their lives in the world in comparison with so noble a vocation. They could have chosen to be more glorious in heaven rather than more comfortable on earth, and thousands of souls would bless them in eternity for having done so.

VII. DIFFICULTIES.

I KNOW the difficulties that will suggest themselves when first the thought of being a priest comes to one's mind.

Most priests have had to meet them in one form or another, and overcome them.

To the thought that "I don't feel any special attraction or strong inclination to become a priest" the answer has already been given. That is not necessary. If you have the necessary qualifications you may choose to accept the general invitation offered by Christ. Have the will to do what you can for Him, give yourself to prayer, and you need not doubt that He is saying to you personally, "Go you also into My vineyard."

Perhaps the thought will come that you are not good enough to become a priest. But no one would ever become a priest if he had to wait until worthy of it. We all have to say that when we see ourselves: we see only weakness and frailty, with little to justify Our Lord's acceptance of us. But we are not expected to be Saints fit for canonisation. Ordinary priests do great work for God. And Our Lord will certainly give us the graces necessary for the duties of the

priesthood; for which, moreover, we will have been fitted by our years of prayer, self-discipline, and every spiritual help in the Seminary.

Or, again, you may be diffident about your ability to manage the necessary studies. But no one is really a judge of his own fitness. You can find out how proficient you are only by making the attempt; and the decision as to whether you have sufficient aptitude can safely be left to the Seminary authorities. Many a Seminarian has been astonished by a success he never thought possible; and many who have not been brilliant as students have become model priests with immense influence for good.

However, the remedy against all such difficulties is prayer. Pray every morning and night, and many times a day, "Lord what wilt Thou have me to do?" For all the chances are that, if you pray perseveringly, your conviction will grow stronger and your difficulties will lose all their force. Strange as it may seem, it is yet true that a boy who is constantly preoccupied with the "reasons" why he should not become a priest is most likely to have a vocation. For to argue with oneself against making such a choice presupposes the thought to make it, and the thought to make it is already an indication that Divine grace is at work within the soul.

VIII. NEED OF PRIESTS.

A World in Distress.

TOWARDS the close of his life, Pope Pius XI declared that, of all the Encyclical Letters he had published, the most important was that on the "Catholic Priesthood." And in that Encyclical he dwells upon the need of further vocations to the priesthood and the duty of fostering them in the souls of the young.

"All should do their utmost," he writes, "to increase the ranks of strong and zealous workers in the vineyard of the Lord; the more so, as the moral needs of society are growing greater instead of less."

Look round the world today. What do you see? Paganism, with its ideas and habits, superstitions and laxity, has gone through society like a poison. It displays itself with the insolence of a conqueror. Governments boast of their independence of religion, and all human passions are let loose against Christ and His Church. Her laws are unknown and her rights are trodden underfoot by nations she drew from barbarism and to which she brought faith, education, art, and all the benefits of civilisation. And the people comprising the nations are more moved by the story unfolded in a picture theatre than by any thought of the sufferings of Christ their Redeemer, and are perishing for want of just that grace and truth Christ gives through His Church.

Never was the Church in greater need of zealous and devoted priests, and Pope Pius XI remarks that "precisely in times that have seemed least propitious, the number of priestly vocations has increased." The very sight of the prevailing evils, and the heroic proportions of the task confronting the Church, probably moves the still Catholic heart to ask: Is my life more precious than that of Christ that I should be fearful lest I waste it in such a cause?

Hatred's Challenge.

BUT if we need further confirmation of the Pope's words concerning the need of priests, we find it hurled at us by the very enemies of the Church. They know that if they can destroy the priesthood they will have destroyed the Church, and priests have inherited their hatred in a special way.

With diabolical cunning some men have concentrated on the task of wiping out the clergy, doing everything possible to hinder further vocations, to prevent the training of a further supply of priests, and boasting that when those die who have already been ordained there will be no one to take their place.

Of course, these enemies of the Church will not succeed. They have not allowed for the response such a challenge calls forth in innumerable Catholic hearts. If they think that, by reviling the priesthood, they will extinguish all desire to be a priest in the souls of coming generations of Catholic boys, they are blind to the lessons of history and to the power of Christ. Meantime, by their efforts against the priesthood, they but show how important to the Church is that priesthood they would destroy, and how necessary to the faithful whom they wish to rob of their religion. And that is no way to discourage the generous hearts of our Catholic young men.

But even though the opposition of enemies defeats its own purpose, and stimulates vocations to the priesthood, it is not merely in a spirit of reaction against their hatred that the desire to be a priest is born within us. At most persecution brings the question into prominence, and forces us to ask what Christ does mean to us, after all. It is then that so many discover a devotion to the Person and to the cause of Our Lord which will not let them rest until they have given themselves completely to Him. Made aware of their vocation, they set out on their journey to the priesthood with the purest of intentions, happy in choosing and being chosen. to serve God at the Altar, to dispense graces to mankind, and in all things to promote the interests of the Kingdom of Christ in this world.

IX FOSTERING VOCATIONS.

All Should Pray.

IN his Encyclical on the "Catholic Priesthood," Pope Pius XI urged upon all Catholics the duty of fostering vocations. "God Himself liberally sows in the generous hearts of many young men this precious seed of vocation," he declared, "but human means of cultivating this seed must not be neglected."

The first duty of all Catholics is that of prayer. "Of all the means, the easiest and the most effective is prayer," writes the Holy Father. "This is, moreover, a means within the power of everyone. It should be assiduously used by all, as it was enjoined by Jesus Christ Himself:

'The harvest indeed is great, but the labourers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that He send forth labourers into His harvest.' (Matt. IX, 33.) What prayers could be more acceptable to the Sacred Heart of Our Saviour?. What prayer is more likely to be answered so promptly and bounteously as this, which meets so nearly the burning desire of that Divine Heart? 'Ask, therefore, and it will be given to you'; ask for good and holy priests, and Our Lord will not refuse to send them to His Church, as ever He has done throughout the centuries."

Influence of Parents.

SECONDLY, Christian parents should regard it as the greatest honour that God should choose their sons to serve Him at the Altar. They should place before their children the ideal of a priestly vocation, and pray that their hearts may respond to its claims. "The first and most natural place where the flowers of the sanctuary should almost spontaneously grow and bloom." writes the Pope, "remains always the truly and deeply Christian family. Most of the saintly bishops and priests whose 'praise the Church declares,' owe the beginning of their vocation and their holiness to the example and teaching of a father strong in faith and manly virtues, of a pure and devoted mother, and of a family in which the love of God and neighbour, joined with simplicity of life, has reigned supreme."

A Blessing on Benefactors.

THIRDLY, all Catholics who can afford to do so should contribute something towards the expenses of those whom Our Lord calls to the priesthood but whose worldly resources are inadequate for their support during the years of study and preparation for so glorious and necessary a vocation. "All salutary works which strive to preserve, promote, and help priestly vocations we praise and bless with all our heart," wrote Pope Pius XI: "In truth, nothing is more acceptable to God, of more honour to the Church, and more profitable to souls than the precious gift of a holy priest. If he who offers even a cup of water to one of the least of the disciples of Christ 'shall not lose his reward,' what reward will he receive who places, so to speak, into the pure hands of a young priest the sacred chalice, in which is contained the Blood of Redemption, and who helps him to lift it up to heaven as a pledge of peace and of blessing to mankind?"

To Every Boy Concerned.

IN this booklet I have tried to set out some thoughts on the Catholic priesthood which will prove interesting and salutary to all its readers. But my primary purpose has been to help those boys and youths who stand hesitantly on the threshold of life, called upon to decide what they will do with their future years.

And if you, dear reader, are one of these, then it is you who are indeed standing at the parting of the ways. It is you

who must make a choice big with possibilities for good or evil, a choice on which your own eternal salvation may depend, and the welfare of innumerable, other souls.

Before you make your choice, bring this scene from Our Lord's life before your eyes.

Satan showed Our Lord all the kingdoms of the world in all their glory. And he said, "All these will I give thee, if falling down thou wilt adore me." But Our Lord saw another vision of all the kingdoms of the world, not in all their glory, but in all their sin and sorrow and suffering. And He chose to be impressed by that vision and resolved to win the world by sharing its sufferings and bearing its sins. So He replied to Satan, "It is written: The Lord thy God shalt thou adore, and Him only shalt thou serve."

Those who have become priests have made that same choice, sharing the sorrows of life, and helping to establish the reign of God over the hearts of men. Could you not make that same choice also, joining their ranks and doing your part towards continuing, as Pope Pius XI expresses it, "the glorious traditions of the Catholic priesthood, and hastening that most propitious hour when it will be given to all humanity to enjoy the fruits of the peace of Christ in the Kingdom of Christ"?

Nihil Obstat:

P. McCABE, M.S.C.,
Censor Deputatus.

Imprimatur:

+ N. T. GILROY,
Archiepiscopus Sydneyensis.
Sydneyi, die 20 Oct., 1944.
