

## Spiritual Challenges for the Priesthood

Rev. Andrew H. Cozzens, S.T.D.

- I. I was asked to speak with you today about the Spiritual Challenges facing diocesan priests.
  - A. In some ways I'm maybe the worst one to speak with you, as I work in specialized ministry.
    1. You guys know better than I about the challenges of the diocesan priesthood.
    2. Although I spent 5 years in busy parish life myself, as well as continuing ...
  - B. As I prayed about what to share with you today, I thought how easy it would be to talk about the main challenges we all know.
    1. First and foremost we are all over-worked and too busy.
    2. We have to spend most of our time doing things we don't feel are spiritually fruitful.
    3. If we are not careful we live on the edge of burn-out.
  - C. But I actually don't want to talk to you about this today.
    1. I want to talk about what, for me, is a much deeper issue.
    2. I think it is at the cause of our struggle with burn-out.
    3. I want to talk to you today about how we as priests resist the cross.
  - D. You might say, resist the cross?, I wish I could resist it!
    1. But it comes to me every day in the form of parishioners who complain.
    2. In the form of the schedule that is too busy, with no time for myself.
    3. In the form of dealing with people in real need whom I don't know how to help.
  - E. All these are part of the cross... and part of what we resist.
    1. But I think the truth is that although we may embrace our crosses in many ways.
    2. We resist often resist the very heart of the cross when it comes to us.
    3. Here I want to speak very reverently, because I am talking to myself.
  - F. The heart of the cross is self-emptying.
    1. Philippians (2:5-8), "Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross."
  - G. I remember very well on my 30 day retreat as I was meditating on the passion of Christ.
    1. How much I was struck by Christ's weakness...
      - a. It hit me that as Christ get's closer and closer to his passion
      - b. He allows himself to become more and more weak.
      - c. Look at Christ in the Garden! Apostles have never seen him like this.
      - d. His enduring of the scourging might be seen as a source of strength.
      - e. But his falling underneath the cross... shows that he was weak.
      - f. He allows himself to be poured out.
      - g. Until finally upon the cross he can move nothing – hands and feet nailed.
      - h. Lord of Heaven and earth – seems powerless and then he dies.

2. In fact we see how the enemy mocks him! If you are the messiah save yourself!
  - a. Demonstrate your power.
  - b. No – Christ would save us by embracing our weakness – this is his way to victory – and it must be our way to victory too.
- H. Do you want to know what I think the greatest temptation of the priesthood is today!
  1. To do something great for God.
  2. To make myself a good priest.
  3. To dedicate all my time and energy to my priestly life, and yet in the end only be building my own kingdom.
  4. To think that **I have to do it.**
- I. The pressures placed on the priest today, which are only going to get worse.
  1. The pressure placed on our time by fewer priests.
  2. The pressures placed by our culture and the need to be efficient and effective.
  3. The pressure we place on ourselves to be Holy!
  4. If we are not cautious, all these pressures will play into the Devil’s plan – because they will make us self-reliant.
  5. We will believe that we have to do it!
  6. If we are self-reliant, we will never fulfill the work the God has for us.
- J. The great temptation of the priest today is to miss the gift of his own weakness.
  1. To try really hard to pretend he is not weak.
  2. To hide his weakness.
  3. To miss the mystery of weakness in his own sanctification.
- K. To become a priest as we are supposed to become – we must become transparent images of Christ.
  1. We must make present in our ministry the heart of Christ.
  2. Not ourselves.
  3. This means that we must be emptied of ourselves.
  4. Here we can begin to see the value of our own weakness.
  5. Here we see how all the pressures go against this self-emptying – rather they want us to be filled with ourselves.
  6. Let me explain.
- II. Cardinal Ratzinger and now Pope Benedict, has spoken often about how the priest must become a transparent image of Christ.
  - A. The priest in some way must seek to disappear so that Christ can appear more clearly in and through the priest.
  - B. To explain this transparency, Cardinal Ratzinger cites an image from St. Augustine who explains what it means for John the Baptist to call himself the “voice” while Jesus is the “word.” St. Augustine uses this image in many places.<sup>1</sup> Cardinal Ratzinger says:
    1. “The relation of “voice” (vox) to “word” (verbum) helps to make clear the mutual relationship between Christ and the priest.... Ultimately, the task of

---

<sup>1</sup> See Augustine, *Sermones* 288, 4 (PL 38, 1306); 289, 3 (PL 38, 1309); 293a, 5-16 (Dolbeau, 387-395); 293c, 1 (PLS 2, 497).

the priest is quite simply to be a voice for the word: “He must increase, but I must decrease” – the voice has no other purpose than to pass on the word; it then once more effaces itself.”<sup>2</sup>

- C. Like John the Baptist, the priest’s mission radically depends on Christ.
- D. Just as Christ’s mission radically depended on the Father.
  - A. Just as Christ was a transparent image of the Father.<sup>3</sup>
  - B. So the priest must decrease so that he can become a transparent image of Christ.
- III. The priest is in this way a means, but not an end in himself.
  - A. This is seen in the preaching of the priest, if he is preaching the word, it is Christ preaching through him.<sup>4</sup>
  - B. But it is most especially clear in the celebration of the sacraments.
    - 1. In the celebration of the sacraments the priest does something he cannot do.
    - 2. What man can take bread and say this is my body and have it become the body of Jesus. Only Jesus can do this.
    - 3. The priest is merely an instrument:
    - 4. Again Cardinal Ratzinger says: “This ‘nothing’ which the apostles share with Jesus expresses at one and the same time the power and weakness of the apostolic ministry. Of themselves, on their own resources, they can do nothing that apostles ought to do. How on their own could they say, ‘Your sins are forgiven’? How could they say, ‘This is my Body’? How could they impose hands and say, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’? Not one of these things which make up apostolic activity happens by virtue of their proper authority. But in this expropriation of their own resources is their communion with Jesus, who is wholly from the Father: with him all things, without him nothing.”<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith* (full reference??), 164. Augustine draws a parallel between Christ who emptied himself and took the form of the slave, becoming transparent to the Father and the minister of the Gospel, who also through self-emptying becomes transparent. The minister’s transparency is exemplified in John the Baptist the voice which is only a messenger for the word. The voice eventually is no longer needed, but the word remains: “*Qui me, inquit, vidit, vidit et Patrem. Unde, nisi quia in forma Dei non rapinam arbitratus est esse aequalis Deo? Quid ergo Philippus videat? Quod semetipsum exinanivit formam servi accipiens, in similitudinem hominum factus, et habitus inventus ut homo* (Phil 2:6-7). Hoc videbat Philippus, formam servi, liber futurus ad formam Dei. Ergo omnium vocum persona Joannes, Verbi persona Christus. Omnes voces necesse est minuatur, quando ad Christum videndum proficimus. Quanto enim proficis ad videndam sapientiam, tanto minus tibi vox est necessaria. Vox in Prophetis, vox in Apostolis, vox in Psalmis, vox in Evangelio. Veniat illud, *In principio erat Verbum, et Verbum erat apud Deum, et Deus erat Verbum. Cum eum viderimus sicuti est, numquid ibi recitabitur Evangelium? Numquid prophetias autituri sumus? Quare? Quia deficient voces, crescente verbo: quia Illum oportet crescere, me autem minui.... Minuitur ergo ministerium vocis, cum fit mentis profectus ad Verbum*” (*Sermo. 288, 5 [PL 38, 1307]*).

<sup>3</sup> Jn 14:9.

<sup>4</sup> Ratzinger continues: “The priest is, like John the Baptist, purely a forerunner, a servant of the word. It is not he who matters but the other. Yet he is, with his entire existence, *vox*; it is his mission to be a voice for the Word, and thus, precisely in his being radically referred to, dependent upon, someone else, he takes a share in the stature of the mission of the Baptist and in the mission of the Logos himself” (*Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 164).

<sup>5</sup> Ratzinger, “Formation of Priests,” 620. See also Balthasar, *Christian State of Life*, 263.

- C. Expropriation – here Cardinal Ratzinger makes his own that great Balthasarian word.
1. It refers to letting oneself be taken.
  2. Surrendering one's own self – to the mission.
  3. This is what ordination does to us – it takes us objectively into Christ's mission.
  4. At the level of our being we are transformed, linked, configured to Christ.
  5. But this must also reach reality in our daily lives.
- D. Because of who the priest is by virtue of his ordination, he must seek to allow his whole life to be given, expropriated for this incredible mission.
1. Only in this way will he be truly a priest.
  2. Only in this way will he be like Christ was – a transparent image of the Father.
- IV. This is why it is so important that a priest have a devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.
- A. The heart is the center of the person.
1. The very center of Christ was his Sacred Heart – on fire with love for man.
  2. To meet Jesus of Nazareth was to encounter the heart of Christ – the heart of the love of God.
  3. The priest too is called to make present the heart of Christ in the world.
  4. The faithful who encounter the priest – should encounter the heart of Christ.
- B. But this will only happen if the man has been emptied of himself.
1. Otherwise they will encounter me –
  2. perhaps a very talented – very disciplined – very efficient –
  3. But still just me – Andrew Cozzens – I cannot save anyone.
  4. If I give the people myself – I give them nothing.
- C. If the priest allows himself to be emptied of himself - then the heart of Jesus lives in him fully.
1. Then when people meet him they meet Christ.
  2. Look at Padre Pio – Look at St. John Vianney – Look at John Paul II.<sup>6</sup>
  3. These were living images of Christ.
  4. They had the heart of Christ burning with in them.
- V. How does the priest do this – how does he allow this transformation of his own subject so he becomes a living image of Christ? This is the Grace of the Sacrament of holy orders.
- A. St. Thomas points out that sacraments have both a principal effect and a secondary effect.<sup>7</sup>
1. The principal effect is grace.

---

<sup>6</sup> As Pope Paul VI said of Padre Pio, “Look what fame he had, what a worldwide following gathered around him! But why? Perhaps because he was a philosopher? Because he was wise? Because he had resources at his disposal? Because he said Mass humbly, heard confessions from dawn to dusk and was – it is not easy to say it – one who bore the wounds of our Lord. He was a man of prayer and suffering” (“Padre Pio da Pietrelcina,” available from: [http://www.vatican.va/news-services/liturgy/saints/ns\\_lit\\_doc\\_20020616\\_padre-pio\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/news-services/liturgy/saints/ns_lit_doc_20020616_padre-pio_en.html); accessed 9 Mar. 2006).

<sup>7</sup> ST III 62, Preface.

2. And the secondary effect, sometimes called immediate effect, in the three sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Orders, is character.
- B. What kind of grace comes in the sacraments?
1. Of course the sacraments bestow sanctifying grace giving people a share in the life of God,<sup>8</sup>
  2. but sacraments also bestow grace proper to each sacrament called “sacramental grace.”
  3. Sacramental grace is given for attaining the ends of that particular sacrament.<sup>9</sup>
- C. With regard to the sacrament of Holy Orders, the grace is given in order for the priest to live in a manner worthy of his consecration.<sup>10</sup>
1. Jean Hevre Nicolas, a not so well know French dogmatic theologian – who should be more well know, describes this grace:
    - a. “The grace of the sacrament of orders gives rise to this burning desire in the soul of the priest, which every day is manifested by prayer for the salvation of souls, and ordinarily by action in the service of Christ the Savior and of the men whom he wants to save. This action is multiform. It has its beginning, its font in the priestly grace which makes the priest participate in the redeeming charity of Jesus Christ.”<sup>11</sup>
  2. This “redeeming charity of Jesus Christ” is of course pastoral charity.
  3. John Paul II simply calls the grace of orders “pastoral charity”:

---

<sup>8</sup> CCC 1129; ST III, 62, a. 1 and 2.

<sup>9</sup> As the Catechism says, “‘Sacramental Grace’ is the grace of the Holy Spirit, given by Christ and proper to each sacrament” (CCC 1129). There are varying theories about how to describe the grace of the sacraments, yet it must be admitted that each sacrament in addition to giving sanctifying grace also gives a grace proper to that sacrament: “La grâce sacramentelle ne serait que la grâce sanctifiante à laquelle s’ajoute une modification lui conférant une vigueur spéciale relative aux effets propres de chaque sacrement” (Albert Michel, “Sacraments,” in *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, vol. 14/1, ed. A. Vacant et alii. [Paris: Editions Letouzey et Ané, 1939], col. 631). St. Thomas explains it similarly: “Consequently just as the virtues and gifts confer, in addition to grace commonly so called [sanctifying grace], a certain special perfection ordained to the powers’ proper actions, so does sacramental grace confer, over and above grace commonly so called, and in addition to the virtues and gifts, a certain Divine assistance in obtaining the end of the sacrament. It is thus that sacramental grace confers something in addition to the grace of the virtues and gifts” (ST III, 62, a. 2, corpus).

<sup>10</sup> St. Thomas explains that God gives sacramental grace for the priest to live in accord with his office: “Now, this belongs to divine liberality: that, if the power for some operation is conferred on one, there can be conferred also those things without which this operation cannot suitably be exercised. But the administration of the sacraments to which the spiritual power is ordered is not suitably done unless one be helped to it by divine grace. Accordingly, grace is bestowed in this sacrament as it is in other sacraments” (SCG 4, 74, n. 5). See also *In IV Sent.*, d. 24, q. 1, a. 1 and a. 2, sol. 1; ST Suppl., 39, a. 1, ad. 3; Vatican II spoke about this grace of orders: “Since, therefore, every priest in his own fashion acts in place of Christ himself, he is enriched by a special grace, so that, as he serves the flock committed to him and the entire People of God, he may the better grow in the grace of him whose tasks he performs” (PO 12).

<sup>11</sup> “La grâce du sacrement de l’ordre suscite en l’âme du prêtre cette sollicitude ardente, qui se traduit toujours par la prière pour le salut des hommes, et dans le cas ordinaire par l’action au service du Christ Sauveur et des hommes qu’il veut sauver. Cette action est multiforme. Elle a son principe, sa source dans la grâce sacerdotale qui fait participer le prêtre à la charité rédemptrice de Jésus-Christ” (Nicolas, *Synthèse Dogmatique*, 1129).

- a. “The sacrament of holy orders confers upon the priest sacramental grace which gives him a share not only in Jesus' saving ‘power’ and ‘ministry’ but also in his pastoral ‘love.’”<sup>12</sup>
  4. Through the grace of the sacrament the priest is made capable of loving with Christ’s own pastoral charity.
  5. He is given Christ’s own heart.
  6. He is called subjectively to live the love of that heart for the people.
  - D. Thus the priest by virtue of the grace and character is given all that he needs to become a living image of Christ – burning with his own pastoral charity.
    1. But to do this he must allow his own life to be expropriated.
    2. He must allow himself to become empty so that Christ lives in him – and nothing else!
    3. The phrase of St. Paul must become the priest’s life: “It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me.”
- VI. How does the priest do this?
- A. How does he subjectively allow his life to be expropriated – completely given for Christ?
    1. He cannot do this on his own.
    2. He must allow himself to be transformed by Christ.
    3. The Priest must allow Christ do this transformation.
  - B. What will be the instrument that Christ uses... to empty the priest of himself?
    1. To make him a transparent image?
    2. It will be his own weakness.
    3. The priest must learn the great gift of his weakness.
  - C. I want to look at two examples of this in the scriptures: St. Peter and St. Paul.
  - D. First St. Peter.
    1. I love Acts Chapter 3, when St. Peter heals the paralyzed man chapter 3 –
      - a. What a great example for the priest.
      - b. What does Peter say: “I have no silver and gold, but I give you what I have; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk” (Acts 3:6).
      - c. Here I think is the great temptation for the priest to give the man something else – silver or gold of some sort.
        - i. This is after all what he was asking for.
        - ii. To give him something human.
        - iii. Something which I have in my control to give.
      - d. But these human things, good advice, material aid, which at times are so necessary – these are not the ultimate goal of the priest’s ministry.
        - i. They are something less than Christ himself.
        - ii. This man was really seeking an encounter with Christ even though he did not know it.
        - iii. He was seeking the healing love that comes from the heart of Christ.

---

<sup>12</sup> PDV 70. See also PDV 72: “If he is to live daily according to the graces he has received, the priest must be ever more open to accepting the pastoral charity of Jesus Christ granted him by Christ's Spirit in the sacrament he has received.”

2. Here is the key: How in this situation was Peter able to give Christ and not himself?
  - a. Answer: He had been emptied of himself.
  - b. St. Peter knew what he really had – he, Peter, had nothing – he was well aware of his nothingness.
  - c. But he had within him the power of Christ – the very heart of Christ – which could work through him.
3. How was Peter emptied of himself?
  - a. Of course we all know – he had to pass through the winepress of humiliation to learn self-emptying love.
  - b. The scriptures record for us many times when Peter was full of himself – even the night before Christ died.
    - i. Christ is beginning to recount to Peter his failure and Peter cries out full of himself: “Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death” (Lk 22:33).
  - c. It will only be through the experience of betrayal that St. Peter will learn the depths of his own self-emptiness.
    - i. This failure will teach him that on his own he has nothing to give.
  - d. Thus he will be a very different person when he Christ rises from the dead and entrusts him with pastoral care.
    - i. Here when St. Peter is asked, “Do you love me?”
    - ii. He is able now to answer with sober realism – “Yes Lord you know that I love you.”
    - iii. Peter will be lead to perfect love now that he has been humbled.
    - iv. Here in these questions he encounters, maybe for the first time, the healing of the heart of Christ.
4. My brothers here is why we must not understand our own failures and struggles as somehow outside of our spiritual lives.
  - a. Somehow because I have failed I am no longer growing closer to the Lord.
  - b. Look how healing happens.
  - c. Christ must make us vulnerable to him – he must humble us before we can be healed.
  - d. Failure is the school of healing, where I can become disposed to being healed.
  - e. If like Peter humbly presents oneself before the Lord with confidence in his mercy.
    - i. Yes failure is painful... but don't we expect pain from a human physician.
    - ii. We know that healing sometimes is painful.
    - iii. St. Augustine even says that the divine physician sometimes allows defects to remain and from time to time augments them by temptations as part of restoring the soul to full health (*de diversis quaestionibus* 83, q. 82.3: PL 40.99; see Arbesmann, 21-22).
  - f. The key is to trust that God is still working in the midst of my failure.
    - i. St. Augustine says: “God knows by what treatment to cure you; He knows by what cutting, what burning to make you whole. You have

- brought sickness on yourself by sinning: He comes not only to nurse, but to cut and burn” (*Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 85.9: PL 37, 1088).
- g. Failure, trials, temptations are often a school of priestly healing – because they empty me of myself and makes me convinced of the power of God for me and for others.
5. Notice how Peter and John heal the man in Acts chapter 3.
- They said, “Look at Us”
  - Look into us and see the presence of Christ.
  - Why was St. Peter able to be a living image of Christ in that moment – a living instrument of Christ the healer?
  - He had been emptied of himself, expropriated.
  - Through humility and vulnerability he had allowed his pride to be healed.
- E. We see a very similar thing that happens in St. Paul.
- Of course we know that St. Paul too had to go through the death of his pride.
    - How does St. Paul describe himself: 1 Tim 1:15-16: “The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. And I am the foremost of sinners; but I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience for an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.”
  - And of course St. Paul’s conversion, like yours and mine, did not happen all at once.
    - He was converted on the road to Damascus,
  - But he had to be purified by his sustained vulnerability and humility before the Lord.
    - We see this in many places but one especially clear place is 2 Cor 12.
    - Here St. Paul talks about his mystical experiences – being drawn up into the third heaven.
    - But he also talks about a thorn in his flesh –
      - Some say a physical weakness.
      - Some say that was a person.
      - Some say it was a moral weakness. I think the latter.
    - The point is though that he begged the Lord to take it away from him, and the Lord said no.
    - Well the Lord did not say no – he said “My grace is sufficient for you.”
  - See how beautiful is the divine physician – he knows exactly what we need!
    - In order to really heal Paul of his pride he had to allow him to struggle with this weakness.
    - This was Paul’s self-emptying.
    - He was being expropriated.
  - This is what would allow him later to say –
    - “Whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (Phil 3:7-8).
    - This came from deep surrender to the Lord to allow him to do deep healing.

- c. This is what will allow him to say: “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).
  - d. Note what he says... I have been crucified – the old Paul has died – now Christ lives.
  - e. He has been expropriated –
  - f. How? He was emptied of himself by learning dependence.
- F. We see in these two great saints – what they had to go through.
- 1. Just how important it was that they be emptied of themselves.
  - 2. Delivered from the deception of self-reliance.
  - 3. In order to make themselves transparent images of Christ.
- VII. This expropriation through weakness is essential for the very heart of the priesthood.
- A. This is because to be a true priest one must be both priest and Victim.
- 1. Christ’s greatest act was not when he preached, nor when he touched, nor when he forgave sinners.
  - 2. Christ’s greatest act, his priestly act, act was when he poured out his life as a sacrifice on the cross.
  - 3. It was this act which brought salvation for the world.
  - 4. It was that moment – when he fully accepted our human weakness.
  - 5. When he became weak with us – that he also saved us.
- B. Thus our part of salvation – is accepting suffering in whatever way it comes to us.
- 1. Accepting the suffering and not running from it.
  - 2. And what is THE greatest suffering that comes to us!
  - 3. Van Zeller – the cross of our own weakness.
  - 4. This is where I am most tempted to run from the cross!
- C. To where do I run?
- 1. Normally to my strength...
  - 2. Which leaves me empty.
  - 3. Ever notice that one of the greatest moments of temptation and loneliness for the priest is after you have been pouring yourself out all day!
  - 4. You come home and you are exhausted and tempted to turn in on self... indulge.
  - 5. Why?
  - 6. Self-reliance – it was me giving and now I want to be fulfilled.
- D. My ministry becomes my ministry – something I do for God – not something God does in me.
- VIII. Here we see the very important difference between fruitfulness and effectiveness.
- A. Much of the formation we get as priests today is to help us be effective.
- 1. But this is not the way that Christianity works!
  - 2. What we need is holiness, not effectivity, and there is a difference!
- B. In a certain way – Christ’s life was not effective.
- 1. What must his followers have thought as they saw the crowds getting smaller and smaller.
  - 2. As they begin to go away when he teaches about the Eucharist.

3. As he continues to challenge the religious leaders of his time.
  4. As he submits to death?
  5. We know that many thought he was a failure – Emmaus.
  6. Because he was not effective.
- C. Christ’s life became fruitful – truly life-giving for the world through what appeared to be a failure.
1. “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (Jn 12:24).
- D. Brothers, to live truly our priesthood we need to judge it by the same standards as Christ.
1. I speak here reverently for I speak of myself.
  2. How easy it is to judge my ministry by secular standards.
  3. Believing that my ministry is a success only if I am effective.<sup>13</sup>
    - a. Am I drawing large crowds?
    - b. Is the collection up or down?
  4. Real fruitfulness in priestly ministry comes in the same way it did for Christ,
    - a. Much more important than effective programs
    - b. Is the self-gift of the priest.
    - c. “Die to self” is the job description.
    - d. If you do this you will find people coming up to you in the airport – your ministry will be fruitful.
  5. Jesus did not embrace a worldly model of success... he embraced the self-emptying of the cross.
  6. Thus the priest’s ministry will only be truly fruitful if he embraces the cross in his daily life, making his life and ministry an offering just as Jesus’ was.
  7. Here we can see how important our prayer lives are.<sup>14</sup>
- E. We see this truth in St. Paul’s description of his own ministry.
1. He describes how, even more than his preaching or teachings, his own daily dying with Christ brought life to the people he served:
  2. “We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you.” (2 Cor 4: 8-12)
- F. What is this affliction?
1. Thorn in the flesh?

---

<sup>13</sup> See the discussion of “Functionalism as Activism,” Toups, 89-95.

<sup>14</sup> One can see here the importance of the priestly life of prayer, which could seem a very ineffective use of time, but in fact is essential for his work to be fruitful: “The hidden life of contemplation, prayerful intercession and interior self-giving are therefore understood as not simply the condition for greater pastoral effectiveness or availability although these might well be the secondary fruits of living so deeply in the Lord. ... they are in themselves the most powerful actualization of pastoral love, for it is through prayer that the priest is drawn into the mystery of Triune love, and it is in loving Christ above all things that the brings forth spiritual fruitfulness in the life of the Church” (Power, 129).

2. His own failures in ministry.
  3. Yet it is all fruitful.
  4. Death is at work in us
  5. Life in you.
- G. I just want to close with one story of a man who taught me so much about what it means to be a true priest.
1. His name is Fernand, and he wanted to be a priest, but shortly before he was to enter the seminary in his 20's he came down with a disease that paralyzed his whole body.
  2. The disease left him in bed, only able to move his head, for over 50 years.
- H. Fernand lives in Gent Belgium, and I met him through the Missionaries of Charity – he lives very close to one of their houses where I have been four times to put on retreats and seminars for them.
1. He is the reason the Missionaries of Charity are in Belgium
  2. When Mother Teresa came to Gent to speak, the people asked her to send them some of her sisters – she responded “You have no poor people here.”
  3. The people took her to meet Fernand.
    - a. Mother Teresa spent several hours at his bedside despite the fact they could not speak a common language.
    - b. At one point someone pointed out to Mother Teresa that in Fernands one room apartment there was no crucifix.
    - c. Mother got very upset and said to his co-worker – don't you see – Fernand is the crucifix – he is hanging on the cross.
  4. Fernand shows us the great mystery of Christ's healing – here is a man who has become a victim soul so that others may be healed.
    - a. He is filled with joy.
    - b. The first time I met him he told me that he is quite sure he has done more good on the altar of his bed than he would ever have done as a priest.
    - c. When I got there I celebrate Holy Mass in his room and he always tells me after Mass – one must long for the Eucharist – as soon as you receive it once you must begin to long for it the next day.
  5. I was so surprised when I met him the second time, after almost 2 years. He remembered my name and said he had been praying for me.
    - a. I thanked him and he simply responded.
    - b. This is my work.
  6. There are government workers and young people who come everyday to feed Fernand and to take care of him.
    - a. The sisters tell me how these young people are constantly converted by him.
  7. Belgium is a country that has basically lost the faith.
  8. In the heart of that country there is a saint who is suffering for all of them.
- I. It was this last visit though that really struck me so much.
1. I was in Belgium just two weeks ago to lead a retreat and we went and had Mass in Fernands room.
  2. He is not in his 70's and the doctor's cannot figure out why he is still alive.
  3. He is still joyfully offering his suffering.

4. He said to me, “Fr. Andrew I am just a man, with all my weaknesses, but I am burning with love.”
  5. I realized that here before me was Christ.
  6. Fernand through his years of suffering has allowed himself to be completely healed – his heart has become the heart of Christ.
- J. My brother seminarians and priests – can we say this?
1. I am just a man with all my weaknesses, but I am burning with love.
  2. This is the goal of every true priest.
  3. My heart burning with the heart of Christ.