

By Janet E. Smith

Conscience and Uncontroversial Truths

May we insist that health care professionals violate their deepest beliefs?

Let me begin with asserting several truths that I hope are obvious and uncontroversial.

1. Human beings generally like to be free to do whatever we want to.
2. Ours is a pluralistic culture. It is a culture that in many ways tries to maximize the opportunity for people to make autonomous choices. We generally limit these choices when they are harmful to others or even significantly harmful to the agent.
3. Simply because the law permits an action does not mean that we as a people have decided that the action is moral. Simply because a person has a right to engage in an action does not mean that others must help facilitate the person in that action.
4. Historically at least, this country has respected the freedom of the individual to practice religion and to not have to engage in actions that would be a violation of conscience. We have recognized that to do otherwise is to slide toward oppression and even totalitarianism.
5. Our democratic society has generally recognized that it is best to have people have their conscience and their desire to live by the truth that they know, be their ultimate guide for their behavior. We know that mandating that people blindly obey the law and make the law the final determinant of their behavior does not, in fact, produce model citizens but possibly dangerous ones.

Let me sketch out some of the justifications for each, though in a slightly different order.

1. Why Do We Like to Make Free Choices?

The respect for the freedom of individuals is generally rooted in an understanding of the nature of the human person. There are dominant philosophies that argue that human beings are simply matter and determined and thus incapable of free choice. Nonetheless, most citizens and lawmakers operate under the assumption that human beings are by nature free creatures. Our willingness to punish people for some of their choices and to reward them for others is rational only if we think they made those choices freely.

We believe that making free choices is essential to our nature and to our happiness. Thus, to respect human beings means to respect their freedom to make free choices. We believe that freedom is a core defining feature of what it is to be human, and we attempt to respect that freedom to a great extent. Again, we tend to limit freedom when an action would harm other people or even the agent himself.

Here are some freedoms we traditionally honor:

1. The freedom not to be forced to marry someone against one's will.
2. The freedom not to be forced to take jobs or join professions we don't want to join.
3. The freedom to choose what state to live in.

We also give people these kinds of freedom:

4. Restaurant owners can set dress codes for their restaurants.
5. Lawyers can refuse to take cases from clients if they don't agree with their case.
6. Stores can refuse to sell items that they find offensive, such as pornography or suggestive clothing.
7. Tattoo artists can refuse to paint tattoos that they find morally offensive.

Limits on people's freedom are generally justified because certain actions harm others or harm the agent in significant ways.

1. Laws against murder and theft limit human freedom.
2. Laws against sex with children and animals limit human freedom.
3. Laws that limit drugs for recreational and medicinal purposes limit human freedom.
4. Laws that require people to wear seat belts and drive below certain speeds and to wear motorcycle or bicycle helmets limit human freedom.

2. Facilitation?

Simply because the law permits an action does not mean that we as a people have decided that the action is moral. Simply because a person has a right to engage in an action does not mean that others must help facilitate the person in that action.

Let me note that we permit people to do some things that are manifestly harmful to themselves and to others:

1. We permit people to smoke cigarettes.
2. We permit people to overeat.
3. We permit people to use pornography.

We do not think that other people or the state need to enable people to do these things. In fact we do not think that other people or the state need to provide opportunities for things that are good for people, like studying music or exercising. Sometimes people and the state do, but we don't think that people have a legal right to have an exercise track, for instance.

We often speak in terms of rights to identify what we think is fundamental to human freedom.

1. We speak of a right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.
2. We speak of a right to food and shelter, to work and to a right to education.
3. We speak of a right to health care.
4. We speak of a right to police protection.
5. We even speak of a right to be wrong.

Rights to be wrong and stupid are rather interesting. Once we have paid our bills and taxes we have the right to spend our money however we like. Some of us do that very stupidly, in ways harmful to others and to ourselves.

In our culture we have the right to be impressively stupid about sexual behavior. We can be as promiscuous as we choose and have legions of children outside of wedlock -- children who often face lives of poverty and serious difficulty; we allow people to spread sexually transmitted diseases, some of them lethal.

Perhaps this is a good point to stress -- not all rights are of the same kind. Traditionally a distinction has been made between negative rights and positive rights.

Negative rights have been described as bestowing a kind of "zone of non-interference." For instance, my right to life means no one can take my life; my right to property means no one can take my property.

In fact, I am going to speak of "non-interference" rights rather than "negative rights" because the term is more descriptive.

Positive rights refer to things to which one has some entitlement; I will speak of these as "entitlement rights": the right to education is an entitlement right -- we understand a right to education to mean that the state must provide us with some level of education; and a right to police protection means that the state must provide us with some degree of police protection.

Sometimes people are unclear on the difference between what constitutes a noninterference right and an entitlement right. What can cause real trouble is when people think that what is a noninterference right is an entitlement right.

It is easy to grasp that just because people have a right to marry doesn't mean that the state needs to find a spouse for everyone.

Just because a person has a right to smoke cigarettes doesn't mean that the state needs to provide cigarettes or even that any store needs to sell cigarettes.

We easily understand that the right to marry (which is a right to something good for you) and the right to smoke cigarettes (which is a right to be foolish) are noninterference rights.

The legal rights to have an abortion or to use contraceptives are also noninterference rights: women have a legal right to these but have no claim on others or the state that they should be provided them.

We must keep clearly in mind that few instances of abortion or contraception truly classify as health care. It is lifestyle choices that explain the vast majority of abortions and contraception. It is fundamentally erroneous to classify abortion and contraception use under the category of "health care needs."

3. Choices

Ours is a pluralistic culture. It is a culture that in many ways tries to maximize the opportunity for people to make autonomous choices. We generally limit these choices when they are harmful to others or even significantly harmful to the agent.

It would be difficult to demonstrate that there is complete logical coherence in what we permit and what we forbid and what the state provides and what the state does not provide. Moreover, as we become a more pluralistic culture, a more skeptical and more relativistic culture, we have a harder time coming to a consensus on what is harmful both to others and to ourselves.

But we do have some standards and principles that serve to guide us. We try to let reason guide us. When some actions are obviously against reason, such as the abuse of children, we are comfortable making all such acts illegal even if some want to engage in such abuse. When the judgments of mature people disagree, we often honor those judgments by allowing things that perhaps most of us would think are not rational good behavior, such as the use of pornography.

Those of us who think pornography is degrading to women and to men and harmful to both would have it be illegal, but our culture had decided that within limits, those who want to use pornography should have access to it. This decision seems to be based largely on wanting to respect the freedom of people, even when respecting their freedom likely means some harm to those engaging in it and to others as well. (But, again, we don't think the state needs to provide pornography.)

Indeed, decisions of what to permit and what to forbid are difficult even for cultures that are confident that they know some truths. I will say more about that in the next section.

4. Individual Freedom

Historically at least, this country has respected the freedom of the individual to practice religion and to not have to engage in actions that would be a violation of conscience. We have recognized that to do otherwise is to slide toward oppression and even totalitarianism.

The Catholic Church, for instance, teaches that even if a state were controlled by the Catholic Church, individuals should have the right to practice other religions. This troubles some Catholics since they think it is wrong to let people worship false gods or worship the true God in false ways. Those Catholics argue that parents do not allow their children to do things that are harmful to them and so the state should not allow the harm that comes from belonging to non-Catholic religions.

Some states that are confessional Muslim states do not allow diversity in religious practice precisely for these reasons. They believe they are honoring God in doing so and protecting the immortal souls of their constituents by doing so.

But the Catholic Church, in the Second Vatican Council document *Dignitatis Humanae* (on Human Dignity), asserts that it is a fundamental human right that people should be able to determine their life choices in accord with their sense of duty and conscience and without undue external pressure.

Veritatis Splendor states:

Certainly people today have a particularly strong sense of freedom. As the Council's Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae* had already observed, "the dignity of the human person is a concern of which people of our time are becoming increasingly more aware." Hence the insistent demand that people be permitted to "enjoy the use of their own responsible judgment and freedom, and decide on their actions on grounds of duty and conscience, without external pressure or coercion." In particular, the right to religious freedom and to respect for conscience on its journey towards the truth is increasingly perceived as the foundation of the cumulative rights of the person. This heightened sense of the dignity of the human person and of his or her uniqueness, and of the respect due to the journey of conscience, certainly represents one of the positive achievements of modern culture. -- No. 31.

The respect that the Catholic Church has for the human person is rooted in its understanding of the human person. Catholics and Christians believe that man is made in the likeness and image of God; that our rationality and ability to make free choices are divine like features of our nature. We are obliged to live in accord with the truth. It is our free choices that form our characters and shape our souls and determine our eternal destiny.

We do not believe we can force any one to believe or that forced good actions are meritorious. Thus Aquinas could argue that the state with the fewest laws would be the best state since people would be free to determine their own destiny most freely.

He, as we, however, knew that many, if not most, people, if given the opportunity, often use their freedom not to make good choices but to make bad choices, choices harmful to themselves and to others. Those who are virtuous would not be inclined to harm others so societies in which men are most virtuous are the ones in least need of laws.

Such thinking actually governed the decisions of many of the founding fathers of this country. They very much wanted a presence for religion in the state since they believed that religion fosters virtue. It was their view that a state that allows free practice of religion is a state that will have fewer laws and be less oppressive.

Catholics and other Christians understand that all human beings have a conscience. It is part of our nature. The conscience is that part of our nature that is concerned that our actions be moral; that we do what is good and avoid what is evil. Catholics and others believe that certain moral truths are easily known by the conscience -- that human beings who don't know that murder and theft are wrong, for instance, are either very damaged or very evil human beings.

We believe that all human beings should know such truths. We believe that even if one's superiors, one's bosses or government leaders should demand that we do certain actions, such as murder or rape, we ought not to do them. We should treat our consciences as a higher law than the law of the land. Such was the decision of the Nuremberg Trials.

Christians should rather be martyred than to do certain actions and to assist in certain actions. Christians should rather be killed than to murder innocent human beings or to assist others in murdering innocent human beings. So Christians have very good reasons both to respect the consciences of others and to want to have their consciences respected.

The concept of conscience is not, of course, strictly religious or confined to Christians. As mentioned, most Americans believe that human beings are by nature free and that it is important that we get to exercise that freedom in respect to the most important decisions of our lives. But we don't really have much of a philosophical foundation for that. It may be because most Americans are Christians or are still shaped by a Christian heritage that we tend to be such fierce defenders of freedom and claims of conscience.

We also have a sense that states that do not respect claims of conscience quickly become totalitarian. States that have an ideology often impose that ideology on all their citizenry; communist nations have little room for conscientious objection to state policy.

5. Freedom of Choice

Our democratic society has generally recognized that it is best to have people have their conscience and their desire to live by the truth that they know, be their ultimate guide for their behavior. We know that mandating that people blindly obey the law and make the law the final

determinant of their behavior does not, in fact, produce model citizens but possibly dangerous ones.

One area in which most of us have been familiar with rights of conscience is the conscientious objection that has been permitted in times of war when the military draft has been in place. We permit those who have a conscientious objection to killing to serve in other ways.

We believe there is something really valuable in protecting the conscientious views of people who refuse to kill, even though we as a culture believe it is moral to kill in self-defense.

As mentioned earlier, we allow practitioners of many professions, such as lawyers, to refuse to serve clients. At times, of course, getting a good lawyer is just as essential to one's well-being as good health care, but we do not force lawyers to violate their consciences and defend those they choose not to defend. We don't force lawyers, simply because they are licensed by the state to operate as "hired guns." We honor their autonomy in practicing their profession.

So let me briefly turn to the example chosen for this article: whether we should allow pharmacists who have a conscientious objection to dispensing drugs that can kill a human embryo to refuse to do so.

Let us get straight here that the pharmacist is not refusing to dispense the drug because of disapproval of what the one purchasing the drug is going to do. Rather the pharmacist is refusing to dispense the drug because she thinks she would be morally culpable for an evil action; that she would be assisting another in taking an innocent human life.

Accountable to her conscience for what she is being asked to do, she refuses to perform an action she believes to be immoral. It is her own evil action that she does not want to perform.

I stated earlier that it is not correct to classify abortion and contraceptives as health care. Abortion is nearly always an elective procedure and use of contraceptives is rarely directed at dealing with any physiological malady. If doctors are forced to do procedures that are elective, we would be forcing them to be "hired guns" or "technicians for hire."

Should doctors be forced to amputate the limbs of healthy people? There are such people. They want to be amputees; some of them claim it is essential to their sense of identity and well-being. They need a surgeon to help them achieve that sense of well-being.

Almost everyone who becomes a physician does so to save lives and reduce suffering. Should physicians be forced to act against this deep core value of their profession to satisfy the lifestyle choices of their patients?

The U.S. Supreme Court some decades ago decided to decriminalize abortion. All 50 states had had laws against abortion. Many religions and most of Western civilization have believed that it is wrong to kill the innocent human life in its mother's womb.

The understanding of many that life begins at conception is not idiosyncratic; there is abundant scientific evidence to bolster that conviction. Indeed, many of those in the pro-abortion movement concede that life begins at conception but insist that a woman's right to choose trumps an embryonic human being's right to life. Our country is still deeply divided over the issue of abortion.

How can we insist that physicians and pharmacists do something that violates the deepest code of their profession?

Don't we desperately want citizens who will refuse to do something that they understand to be killing an innocent human being? Won't we be driving away from the professions of physician, pharmacist, and many others, those who are precisely the kind of principled people we need to have in such professions; those who think justice and protection of innocent human life are among the most important values of all? TP

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By Andreas Hock

The Visionary of Patmos and Priestly Spirituality

The aim of this essay is to take another look at the author of the Book of Revelation, John, on the Greek island of Patmos, to rediscover aspects of apostolic and ecclesial attitudes that can well function as ingredients for a healthy spirituality for Catholic priests. And so, who is this John (Rv 1:1,4,9; 22:8) in the Apocalypse¹, and what does he say and do that could inspire us?

I. An ecclesial and apostolic person: 'servant,' 'brother' and 'partaker'

John is a personage of super-regional influence and authority. He is at the same time a humble and faithful member of the Christian community in Asia Minor. His vision is a lively participated interaction with the widest imaginable range of interlocutors, underscoring the universality of the very revelation.

A. An apostolic personality: He consistently writes in the first person², which adds to the immediacy and sprightliness of his accounts. That he was a man of vast influence and apostolic authority can be gathered from a fourfold circumstance:

1. He addresses himself to a major ecclesial circumscription, that is, seven Churches in Asia Minor (Rv 1:4), ultimately representative of the totality of the Church since the biblical number seven stands for any given fullness. Are we priests not also called to go out and missionize in first person, visiting and evangelizing people within the boundaries of our parishes and dioceses and beyond? Yes, in fact, our priestly mission shares in the universal mission of the Church.

2. To identify himself he simply uses the expression "I, John" (1:93), implying that he was universally known in his time. We might recall Christ's discourse about the intimate and mutual knowledge that links the good shepherd to his flock (Jn 10) and how his sheep know his voice. Our priestly voices, too, should be well known to all those placed under our care.

3. The truly catholic content of the revelation given to him. Preachers should take this to heart, that in the course of their ministry they have to address all the areas of Catholic doctrine on faith and morals. Our lay faithful have a right to hear it and to have it explained to them on a systematic and regular basis.

4. John's opening and closing greetings, Rv 1:4-6 and 22:21, are reminiscent of Paul's salutations at the beginning and end of his letters⁴. Among the many possibilities of communicating with our people is certainly the means of writing, something that can be sent, received, read and reread. Also, the greeting extended is that of "grace" and "peace." What greater gifts and blessings could be wished on our flock than the precious grace and power that comes from God for the sanctification of souls, as well as the gift of peace bestowed on the apostles by the risen Lord!

The above reflections help us realize how apostolic the sacred author is in his thoughts and words and actions.

B. An ecclesial person: Let us now look at the three ways in which John describes himself, titles that demonstrate his deep involvement in the life of the Church:

1. Servant: The title "servant/slave" in Rv 1:1 is followed by the personal pronoun "his," which can grammatically be linked to either God or Christ at the beginning of the verse. John, therefore, understands himself as the servant/slave of God and of Christ before everything else. His service is seen as being intertwined with that of other servants of God, Rv 1:1, that is, of the members of the Church. And so, as priests, we are first the servants of God together with all the baptized in the Church. This dimension of divine service as the priority is paramount. If we do not serve Him

first, then all other forms of service are deprived of that union with Christ, and are easily degenerating into mere social work and shallow activism.

A closer look reminds us that the designation "servant" sets the author of Revelation and all servants of God on a level of parity with prominent biblical personalities of the Old and New Testaments such as Abraham (Ps 105:6), Jacob (Is 41:8; 1 Ch 16:13), Isaac (Gn 24:14), Moses (Jos 1:1), Joshua (Jos 24:29; Jgs 2:8), David (2 Sm 3:18; Ez 37:24), Solomon (1 Kgs 1:19), Elijah (1 Kgs 18:36), Paul (Rom 1:1), James (Jas 1:1), Peter (2 Pt 1:1), Judas (Jude 1:1), and Jesus himself (Acts 3:13).

Furthermore, John serves the servants of God, as it were, by making known to them the revelation of Christ. They are the intended audience of his message. It is easy to see ourselves in all this: The priest is a mere herald of God's good tidings to a people comprised of servants who are waiting to hear the Word of God. They are eager to act upon the will of Christ, but are in need of someone to illustrate it to them. Thus, the preacher serves them by making himself the mouthpiece of God's own word. Without his intermediation the servants would be deprived of guidance and hope.

2. Brother: This John is at the same time a loyal brother of those who serve God, Rv 1:9, now exiled on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. We should always keep in mind that we, too, are brothers to our people as children of our heavenly Father. The sacrament of baptism incorporates us into the body of Christ and we should often remember Augustine's word: "With you I am a Christian, for you I am a bishop."

3. Partaker: From Rv 1:9 the reader also learns that John has a share in the tribulation, the kingdom and the patient endurance of his communities in Jesus. In other words, the tribulations are born in a spirit of patience in view of an ultimate reward and in union with Christ himself. This partaking in the fullness of the Christian life, including its afflictions and trials, should be a characteristic of every priest's life as well, as he strives to literally live "in Christ."

II. Receiver of a universal revelation

Reading through the text of the Apocalypse we are also inspired by the way the seer interacts with a variety of more or less identified persons who address themselves to him in the course of his visions.

Twice he is addressed directly by God, 1:8 and 21:5-8. Does this not animate us to cultivate a vivid and intense prayer life in which we strive to remain turned to our heavenly Father as our Abba in all openness to his will?

John also receives immediate commands from the Son of Man to write down what he sees and hears, Rv 1:19; 2:1,8,12,18; 3:1,7,14; 22:6, while the Son of Man places his right hand on him

and encourages him in 1:175. An ongoing conversation from heart to heart with Christ in prayer, studies and daily pastoral service will enable us, too, to translate to our communities the will of the Lord.

Then there is one of the living creatures inviting the visionary to come and see, Rv 6:1,3,5,7; 7:4. The name of these beings could help us to be ever more aware that our whole vocation is at the service of life, principally the supernatural life of grace that we communicate to those placed under our care. Only the priest can give this interior life to the souls especially through the administration of the sacraments of the Church. Why should we not invoke the presence and assistance of those living beings for a fruitful ministry?

Moreover, one of the bowl angels approaches John, calling on him to contemplate the damnation of Babylon, Rv 17:1. The same angel afterwards promises to interpret the visionary scene, Rv 17:7,15,18. Another bowl angel accompanies John to show him the Heavenly City, the new Jerusalem, Rv 21:9,10; 22:1. Eventually a last command is given by the angel not to seal the entire book of the Apocalypse, Rv 22:10. It is no secret that our familiar contact with the world of the good spirits, the angels, will enable us to see the larger context of the history of salvation, to read the signs of the times, and to discern between good and evil in our priestly life.

Next we see one of the elders comforting the apostle at the very moment when he sees the Lamb and the scroll sealed a sevenfold, Rv 5:5. We, too, are experiencing instances of interior desolation over the state of affairs of our communities, of our parishes, of persons that come to us seeking help. In those times it is of solace and encouragement to know that we are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses, Heb 12:1, the saints of God, who intercede for us and teach us by their word and example. The saints became saints because of their devotion to earlier saints! The priest should stand with both feet within the communion of the saints.

Thus, it becomes clear that the author of the Apocalypse is being contacted by the widest possible range of persons belonging to the supernatural world, which underscores the universal character of the revelation. Interestingly, his visual experiences⁶ prevail over the auditive ones⁷, as if to say that one should be more attuned in our inner life to images than to words.

III. Prophetic participation

Our priestly spirituality finds further confirmation in a number of autobiographical hints in which the sacred author illustrates his ecstatic experience "in Spirit" on the dominical day, Rv 1:10. He sees heaven open and is invited to ascend further, Rv 4:1f, raptured "in Spirit." Likewise, he is transferred "in Spirit" to the desert by one of the bowl angels, Rv 17:3, and in Rv 21:10 John is being taken "in Spirit" unto a high mountain. We have the irreplaceable task of teaching our

communities how to sanctify this first day of the week. John's ascent and spiritual locomotions can also remind us to remain open to change and growth in our interior life.

At one point he turns to see the mighty voice, Rv 1:12, a somewhat curious gesture that indicates that we have to be prepared for unexpected events in our ministry, happenings that surprise us. The visionary's turning to see the voice also means that we have to go out of our way to grasp the mystery of our faith ever more deeply.

On another occasion we learn that John falls at the feet of the Son of man as though dead, Rv 1:17. Especially during our times of personal prayer, or at times of desolation or fatigue, when our ministry becomes overwhelming, we should prostrate ourselves at Jesus' feet as well to find new strength and help.

In Rv 5:4 the seer admits to his profuse weeping because nobody was found worthy to open the sealed book that contains the plan of God regarding humanity and its history. Our priestly love for Christ and for souls should make us realize, too, that there is a profound unworthiness in us. We are God's unworthy servants, chosen by his mercy to work in the vineyard of the Lord, chosen to further God's design here on earth. The thought of it should make us humble and ever more trusting in the Lord.

Then there is that brief dialogue taking place between him and one of the elders in Rv 7:13f. The elder represents the saints in heaven. Does this not highlight the importance of our belonging to the communion of all the saints, and how we should foster a lively and personal contact with them?

Rv 10:9 describes how John approaches one of the angels and receives the order to take and eat the little booklet. He feels its sweetness in his mouth and its turning bitter in his stomach. How fervent is our devotion to the holy angels? They have a similar task to ours, that of being mediators between God and men. We do well to cultivate a personal friendship with our guardian angel. In our openness to the angels we will also be able to better discern the will of God, as symbolized by the booklet. As long as we are pilgrims, the will of our heavenly Father will be demanding and sometimes even cause pain and suffering, indicated by the bittersweet flavor in the scene mentioned above.

An unidentified active subject gives John a measuring rod with the command to get up and measure the temple, altar and worshippers, and the injunction not to measure the atrium, Rv 11:1f. It is not easy to interpret this apocalyptic symbolism, but the handing over of that measuring instrument might remind us of our priestly task and responsibility to know those entrusted to us, like a good shepherd knows his sheep.

In Rv 19:9 it is an unidentified voice that commands the apostle to write down his visions. There are numerous saints in the history of the Church that have bequeathed to us their spiritual personal diaries, describing the wonderful things that God's grace has worked in their lives. The above command should encourage us, too, to ever more deeply appreciate our priestly life, and to make assessments of it from time to time, for instance during our annual retreats.

Attesting to the credibility of his visions the sacred author declares in Rv 22:8: "I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things." In our ministry we should identify ourselves personally and totally with the Holy Church, with her teachings and traditions. She is our bride, and we are the friends of the bridegroom (Jn 3:29). The people entrusted to us have a right to hear from us a convincing testimony about the truth of Christ, and our preaching and teaching has to come from that core of a priestly witness to Him alone. We have to be imbued with the true doctrine, and love it with an undivided heart, just as we see John approving of the vision with the liturgical "Amen," expressive of his complete adherence to what has been revealed as well as his confidence in the revealing God, Rv 22:20.

Finally, the Apocalypse flows into the all-embracing apostolic greeting: "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all" (Rv 22:21), paradigmatic for the desire of any good pastor of souls. We ultimately work for the establishment and nourishment of God's grace in their lives. If the life of God is destroyed or impeded, then we pray and work for a rebirth, a new beginning in His grace mainly through the sacraments.

Conclusion

In closing this essay let us summarize the ways in which the visionary of Patmos might inspire our priestly ministry. Distilling the above thoughts we could group the results together as follows:

1. Universal mission: John can teach us to appreciate the universal mission of the Catholic priesthood, evangelizing people within the boundaries of our parishes and dioceses and beyond. With diligence should we instruct them in all the areas of faith and morals. Obviously, writing is still an important means of communicating with our people. People should see in us persons who totally identify with the mission of the Church, who live in a bridal relationship with her with an undivided heart, unconditionally proposing and defending her teachings.

2. Life of grace and life of prayer: John also reminds us that God's grace and peace are the greatest blessings that we can work for. We do this primarily by spending time every day in an intense prayer life, spiritually prostrating at Jesus' feet to be refreshed especially in times of disappointment and exhaustion. This is how we open ourselves to the multifarious surprises of God's providence in our ministry. It also reinforces in us the attitude of humility and the

awareness of our profound ineptitude and unworthiness in his service. Spiritual exercises and regular retreats are certainly part of our priestly spirituality.

3. Service to God and to our brothers and sisters: It is never superfluous to affirm that we are first the servants of God together with all the baptized, that is, the divine service is the source and summit of our entire ministry. Part of this reality is to sanctify the day of the Lord by word and example. But then also we are brothers to our people, brothers and sisters in Christ, as children of God by virtue of the sacrament of baptism. As we share in their lives we also share in their trials and tribulations.

4. Devotion to the angels and saints: In his frequent dealings with the angels and elders the sacred author also encourages us to befriend ourselves more and more with them, and to pray for their intercession and enlightenment, for guidance and protection.

5. Internalize the Scriptures: St. John should also inspire us by his contact with the word of God as he swallows it, making himself vulnerable with regard to the sweet and at times also bitter implications of living in God's will.

But coming back to the person of the inspired author himself we realize how vividly and eagerly he cooperates with God's plan. His fear of God, total honesty, obedience, availability, humility, pastoral zeal and charity are discernible throughout. In one word, he is a personality worthy of every respect and trust, a person imbued with a truly priestly spirituality. TP

2 To the exception of Rv 1:1-3; 1:2 emphasizes the credibility of his visions.

3 Quite conspicuous especially after the divine "I am" in the immediately preceding verse 8.

4 For instance Rom 1:7; 1 Co 1:3; 16:23f.; Gal 1:3; 6:18.

5 Cf. Mt 17:7.

6 Cf. Rv 5:1,2,6,11; 6:1,2,5,8,9,12; 7:1,2,9; 8:2,13; 9:1,17; 10:1,5; 11:19; 1:1; 13:1,2,11; 14:1,6,14; 15:1,2,5; 16:13; 17:3,6; 18:1; 19:11,17,19; 20:1,4,11,12; 21:1,22.

7 Cf. Rv 1:10; 5:13; 6:3,5,6,7; 8:13; 9:13; 10:8; 12:10; 14:2,13; 16:1,7; 18:4; 19:1,6; 21:3.

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