My First Months as a Priest  

Three Stories

Three Blessings

Here are just three of the many blessings from my first months as a priest!

Less than one week after my ordination in Rome, just outside of Milan Italy, I was able to celebrate a Mass on the tomb of St. Gianna Molla. Not only did I celebrate the Mass, but the daughter of St. Gianna attended, the one that she died giving birth to! How rare is it to meet and pray with a woman whose mother is a saint! My sister, Sr. Mary Gianna, OP, who took St. Gianna as her patron saint when she entered the convent, was there too.

In February, I celebrated my first Mass at my home parish of St Clement of Rome in St Louis, Missouri. After being away from my parish for 12 years in the Legion it was great to return for a first Mass as a priest and give out first blessings. How much I owe all the faithful in my home parish who have been my greatest spiritual cheerleaders!

In March, I had the grace to go on my first international mission trip as a priest! I flew with Regnum Christi missionaries and some college students to the Mayan jungles in Mexico where we spent the week in Chun-yah. There we continued building the village’s first Catholic church since the Spanish missionaries left in the 1800’s. On the last day of the mission I was able to bless the foundation of the new church with the Eucharist during our Eucharistic Procession. How awesome it is to be Christ’s priest and missionary!

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Fr. John Klein at the tomb of St. Gianna, with St. Gianna’s daughter and Fr. John’s sister, Sr. Mary Gianna, OP
**My First Months as a Priest**  
*continued*

**Blessed to be His Instrument**

Being ordained a priest is the greatest grace that one can imagine. Like all graces, it is above all a spiritual reality, sometimes imperceptible and requiring faith to be understood in its fullness. I’ve already had many opportunities to experience the power of that transformation that took place on December 16th, and to exercise my faith in that mystery.

The first days of priesthood were very blessed. I celebrated my first Mass in the Church dedicated to St. Thérèse of Lisieux in Rome, to thank her for some special graces she obtained for me to help me persevere in my vocation. In the first week, I had two opportunities to serve as confessor and already experienced God working through me, giving people his forgiveness, and seeing him spread his joy through my ministry.

I was also blessed to spend some days in Turin celebrating a first Mass for friends and benefactors. In January, I visited my home in Chepstow, Canada, where I baptized my nephew, gave first communion to my nieces, and anointed the sick and brought them communion. I also visited my elementary school and was able to speak to them and sing with them.

Because I am still assigned to studies at the Pontifical Athenaeum Regina Apostolorum (the Church’s educational institution directed by the Legion of Christ), I spent much of my winter and spring back in class. Even so, one is a priest at every moment, in everything he does – when writing assignments, studying for exams, taking notes in class, a priest is making himself an instrument through which God’s grace can come into the world. – Fr. Adam Zettel, LC

**Life as a Professor Priest**

After my first Solemn High Mass on Gaudete Sunday, I presented my mother with the purification that dried my hands the Cardinal consecrated. I gave my father the stole used when hearing my first confession. Then we journeyed through the city where I offered the Mass for them each day at the Catacombs of St. Callixtus, the tomb of Pope St. John Paul II, the Basilica of St. Mary Major, the Basilica of St. John Lateran, and the Clementine Chapel under the Papal Altar of St. Peter’s Basilica and near the tomb of the apostle. Between these unforgettable liturgies, I was able to share in person the treasures about which I had so often written them.

As my ordination classmates departed Rome for their exciting new assignments, some fellow priests offered me condolences for my assignment to remain in the Eternal City locked in my room as a professor. Without disregarding the blessings associated with long hours of study and reflection in my office, I wanted to share some of the other rewarding experiences of my first months of priesthood.

My work in the Faculty of Bioethics at Regina Apostolorum has brought me in contact with a fascinating group of thinkers. I am also an Adjunct Theology Professor and Chaplain for 43 Christendom College students studying abroad, often spending Thursday evenings hearing confessions and giving Eucharist Benedictine to the university students who attend our weekly Upper Room Holy Hours in Rome. Finally, during Holy Week, the NBC Today Show included me in a brief television segment on life in the Vatican that allowed me to share some of the joys of my priesthood with their vast audience. – Fr. Michael Baggot, LC
DISCERNING GOD’S CALL

Young men seriously discerning a call to the priesthood arrived at the Legion’s Novitiate and College during Holy Week for a Test Your Call! (TYC) retreat. This year, eighteen men came to live with the community, experiencing the schedule of a Legionary seminarian, and accompanied by a team of six novices to guide them through the day and answer any questions they might have.

Daily talks and meditations were given by one of the Legion’s national vocation directors, Fr. Edward Hopkins. The talks were interspersed with the usual activities of prayers and meals, but also with community work, sports, and the special Holy Week observances of Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday. On Holy Saturday, some of the young men participated in street missions in New York City.

Thirty-nine young men from Holy Spirit Preparatory School, located in Atlanta, Georgia, participated in a separate retreat. Vocational retreats are held at various times during the year. For more information, contact vocation@legionaries.org or call 203-631-2894.

2018 Diaconate Ordinations

Thirty-nine Legionaries will be ordained as transitional deacons during 2018, including eleven from the North American Territory. In the past, our transitional deacons were ordained as priests during the month of December. However, priestly ordinations for these deacons will take place in May of 2019. Here are some details about this year’s diaconate ordinations.

Syracuse, New York

Date: May 19, 2018
Celebrant: Bishop Robert J. Cunningham
Legionaries for ordination:
Br. Eric Gilhooly
Br. Patrick O’Loughlin
Br. Nathan Wayne

Note: These men are all from Syracuse and are being ordained in the diocesan diaconate ordinations. Br. Patrick’s father is also being ordained as a permanent deacon.

Houston, Texas

Date: July 7, 2018
Celebrant: Cardinal Daniel DiNardo
Archbishop of Galveston-Houston and president of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops.
Legionaries for ordination:
Br. Jared Loehr
Br. Justin Prigge
Br. Jerek Sherber
Br. John Studer
Br. Samuel Tan
Br. Nathan Torrey
Br. Christopher Vogel

Dunedin, New Zealand

Date: September 2018
Celebrant: Most Rev. Patrick Dunn
Legionary for ordination:
Br. James Cleary

Please keep our newly ordained transitional deacons in your prayers as they prepare for their priestly ordination in May, 2018.
The Context of Holiness

When you’re twelve years old, there are a lot of things you are trying to figure out about life. Like how to keep your mom from noticing when you haven’t done your chores. And how to stop your pesky brother from bursting into your room uninvited. Oh, and that question that dances in the corner of your mind, some days like an unopened Christmas present and other days like a black hole: what is my life for?

St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus crept into my life at precisely this age. After reading her autobiography, Story of a Soul, I knew one thing for sure: life was sainthood or bust. It wasn’t until years later that I understood what made the holiness of St. Thérèse and her parents, Sts. Louis and Zélie Martin so compelling to me: context. Within the context of their life circumstances, good or ill, they lived in love of God and one another.

Their lives were filled with chronic illnesses, emotional deprivation, untimely deaths, anxiety and depression. You will also find them radiant with human affection and divine love. The context of their holiness was not orderly, polished or ethereal, which is precisely what makes it so real.

On Holy Thursday, I found myself with a group of young missionaries evangelizing on the streets of Soho, NYC, just a couple blocks from Old St. Patrick’s. It’s the kind of environment – destitute, hostile, glamorous - that makes you question the value of a lifetime of trying to be holy. Ninety percent of the surging river of passersby threw us a blank look, a sneer, or simply, “No, thanks.”

Finally, one young woman in a belly shirt and tight jeans emerged from the crowd. Her gentle smile surfaced from below pierced nose and eyebrows and a cropped hair cut. “Yes, I’m Catholic,” she said, and gratefully accepted a Mass schedule, directions to St. Patrick’s Cathedral, and a rosary. She certainly wasn’t the one I expected to stop that day. But what did I know about the context of her holiness?

Later I watched one of our missionaries, clothed in a blue veil and tunic, kneeling in a living representation of Mary in the Stations of the Cross. Hours before, she had told me how unworthy she felt to play the role of the Blessed Virgin. She glowed with compassion as she reached to comfort the bleeding and exhausted Christ before her. Her look said nothing of the painful, destructive past from which she had just emerged. Or perhaps it said everything about it: the context of her holiness.

Can you put in your own words what holiness is? I don’t mean what you can recite from the catechism, as valuable as that is. I mean the answer that comes from the pages of your own life story, which is as compelling as St. Thérèse or the missionaries I met in New York. Everyone’s holiness has a context. What’s yours?

For more about how to be holy, read Pope Francis’ new apostolic exhortation, Gaudete et Exsultate (Rejoice and Be Glad) On the Call to Holiness in Today’s World. You can find it for free on the internet.

Alexandra Hochhaus grew up near Philadelphia and has been a Consecrated Woman in Regnum Christi since 2001. She worked in Regnum Christi schools from 2006-2017. Alexandra currently serves as a Territorial Secretary in Atlanta, Georgia.
A Call from the Church
Director of the Office of Women’s Issues

Marta Rodríguez, a consecrated woman in Regnum Christi, is the first director of the office of women’s issues in the Vatican Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life. It is a new dicastery, created by Pope Francis. Her mission is to help the Church understand women and their appropriate contribution to the world, what it means to be a woman in the world today, and where women are going in the future.

“This assignment indicates a call from the Church, which for me is a call from God,” Marta said. “Since 2000, I’ve worked continually on women’s issues, both in studies and in action on various projects.”

She was 20 years old when first sent to Rome. Her first mission was to be part of a “think tank” to develop the “new feminism” that Saint John Paul II launched with his “Letter to Women” in 1995. This led to the founding of the Institute for Higher Women’s Studies in 2003. Marta began giving international conferences, working with professors, opinion leaders, and even politicians.

In 2004, she was asked to help guide the pastoral work in Rome. This involved coordinating the service of 14 consecrated women working in 10 parishes and being part of the pastoral team of the Institute of Higher Studies of the Pontifical Atheneum Regina Apostolorum in Rome. She also coordinated vocations work in Europe, launched apostolic projects, organized retreats, formation courses, missions, and summer camps. In those years she completed masters in philosophy and anthropology.

She was called to be the directress of the Pontifical Atheneum Regina Apostolorum in 2009. Her two main areas of concentration were anthropological and family/work. A research team of men and women from different disciplines (philosophers, theologians, psychologists, lawyers, neuroscientists) worked in the area of anthropology. Since 2014 they have worked on the significance of sexual identity. As a result they published two books, offered five courses, and organized many seminars.

Apostolic projects at the institute included “Value@Work” to promote the contribution of women to the professional field, and improve work-life balance — and “Valore Mamma” to promote the idea that motherhood has social value that needs to be protected. The institute has other projects and activities for young people, and many formation activities in general.

During these years, Marta earned a masters in bioethics. Before beginning her role as director of women’s issues, Marta completed a Doctorate in Philosophy at the Gregorian University.

“Life in the Vatican has a very different rhythm than outside,” says Marta. “Everything needs to be very well thought, analyzed. I represent the Holy See, and that requires prudence, and decisions require more time.”

In developing her thinking about women’s issues, Marta has come to believe in the importance men and women working together in synergy. “One of the points I feel as part of my mission, is to promote the collaboration of men and women inside and outside the Church. To do that we need to educate both, priests, religious and lay people, to the proper relationship.”
In his book, One Step Closer: 40 Doses of Motivation, Hacks, and Experiences to Share with Millennial Catholics, Br. Anthony Freeman wrote, “I believe God created me from all eternity with a specific mission in mind.” For those who knew and loved Br. Anthony, it was hard to believe that his mission on earth would end so soon. The sad news came on April 2, 2018 that he died of natural causes at the Legion of Christ’s seminary in Rome.

Just the day before, Br. Anthony served as an acolyte for Pope Francis’ Easter morning Mass, carrying the cross in the opening procession. The week prior to Easter, he had spent in spiritual exercises. He was studying theology and preparing for his diaconal ordination to take place on July 7 in Houston.

Br. Anthony Freeman, a native of Louisiana, was just twenty-nine years old. In the past few years of study and formation, he expressed a desire to “present the richness of the spiritual life in a modern language.”

One Step Closer, published just a few months before his passing, is a collection of reflections created during Lent in 2017 based on short, motivational Instagram messages he had posted on social media. It was inspired after a fellow seminarian handed him a business book with a motivational phrase on one page and an explanation of that phrase on the opposite page.

Br. Anthony knew the power of communicating through social media. He managed a Facebook page called “Catholic Life Coach” and attracting more than 11,000 followers on Instagram. He counted Venerable Fulton Sheen as one of his heroes, he said, because of “how dedicated he was to his mission and his ability to communicate the good news of Christ.”

Through his online outreach, his outgoing personality, and his strong desire to spread the good news of Christ, Br. Anthony completed the “specific mission” God had given him. We are thankful for his witness and encouragement. May Our Lord grant him eternal rest.

To view a short video tribute or to participate in the Br. Anthony Memorial Seminarian Scholarship Fund, visit www.lccheshire.org
No one can predict the future, but we all want to leave the world a better place for our children and grandchildren, and those we love, and those who will come after us who we don’t even know today. One way to do that is to help the Church we so dearly love. You can do this by supporting our seminarians and priests.

When it comes to writing your will, you have the ability to choose how to distribute your assets — and who you want to receive them. Many supporters have helped us in our mission of revealing His love, forming apostles, and sending them out to help build the Kingdom of Christ by remembering the Legion of Christ in their final plans.

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A GUATEMALA REFLECTION
by Brigid Hoagland

I traveled recently with a group of students from Benedictine College, accompanied by Fr. Simon Devereux, to Joya de Los Centros in Guatemala. Our goal was to assist in the construction of a church and minister to their various needs. Upon arriving at the village, we were embraced into the arms of a tight-knit community and educated on how to live as His children. These people knew how to live.

Each person had a role in the village and they dedicated themselves to their work for the sake of their neighbor. I think this is what humanity should look like – everyone using their gifts and talents for others.

It was through this self-giving that I encountered the beauty of what it means to be the Church. The people of God are called to live like the poor in Guatemala – to give themselves in service, strengthening and building up His Body.

I am learning that it is more important to live alongside another than to simply be charitable. Sure, I did manual labor and delivered clothes and medicine. But, more importantly, I encountered the face of God by sitting at the well with my brothers and sisters, engaging them in dialogue, and learning the needs and desires of their hearts.

Maybe evangelization looks less like preaching, more like picking flowers. Less like doing, more like being. Less like efficiency, more like being still. Maybe being like Christ is just being with people – sitting at the well and asking questions, or sitting at the well in silence. Maybe the best way to live like Christ is to live with people and be present to one another.

Brigid is a student at Benedictine College studying Theology and Evangelization and Catechesis.