

AN IDEAL PRIEST OF GOD

"Thou art a priest forever." Inexplicable is the young Levite's joy when he hears these words pronounced by the bishop. He is a priest forever, an anointed one of God, yea more, even another Christ. Filled with the Holy Ghost, he is inspired to the noblest endeavor. No sacrifice is too much for him for God's honor and glory. Yet the great arch-enemy is always at work. The devil is particularly anxious to entrap this anointed soul. He is jealous of his priestly dignity and fears the influence of God's minister. Soon the young priest realizes again that besides being "another Christ," he is still a son of Adam, subject, as before ordination, to the common failings of men. He needs to be encouraged but what greater encouragement could the young priest have than the exemplary lives of his co-laborers in the great vineyard of the Lord?

It has pleased God to have recently called from among us one whose life was an inspiration to all. As an ideal Dominican priest, we who are about to receive the sacred character, could do no better than make him the pattern of our priestly lives. For this purpose, let us consider briefly not the well known facts in the saintly life of Father McKenna but rather a few of those things which made him the ideal priest of God and the beloved pastor of the fold.

Perhaps the greatest influence for good in the life of our saintly model lay in the fact that he always cherished a most exalted reverence for his priestly dignity. He realized vividly from the first moment of his ordination that the priest is wholly absorbed in the person of Jesus Christ. "So complete," he would say, "is this absorption that the visible priest at the altar is, as it were, but the veil which hides from human sight, the Divine and Eternal Priest, Jesus Christ." The priest for him was a hero not because he rescued the body but because his whole reason for existence was to rescue countless numbers of souls from the perilous flames of perdition. These thoughts ever uppermost in his mind, inspired him to strive to correspond with the grace of his state and to make daily advancement in his priestly perfection. How often have we heard him say, "My sons, do not neglect the grace which God has given you. It was not to His angels but to His priests that God gave the extraordinary power of

daily bringing from His heavenly Throne, Jesus Christ Himself to be present on our altars. To His priests alone He accorded the privilege of holding Him in their hands and of giving Him in Holy Communion to His creatures. Not to His angels, but to His priests, has He given the power of restoring sin-stained souls to His love and friendship. His angels may assist; His angels may move sinners to repentance; but His priests alone can blot out the stain of sin, and restore the soul to its baptismal innocence, and to the grace and favor of God. Ah, my sons, if we were penetrated with this truth as we ought to be, Our Divine Lord would have a living reality in us." Now that Father McKenna has gone to receive the reward of his long and faithful life, we may boldly proclaim that he had thoroughly grasped the meaning of this great truth for his every word, work and action manifested clearly his sublime conception of the exalted dignity of the priest.

True love for the Master and zeal for His honor and glory are characteristics to be found in every saintly life. Father McKenna possessed these traits in an eminent degree. He had imbibed from his mother that strong and living faith from which is born true charity. His love for God was a living flame consuming all with which it came in contact, making of it a sacrifice to be offered to His God. Naturally, then, he strove to make his own life a holocaust, the external expression of which was, "I live, now, not I but Jesus Christ in me." The way of perfection is a difficult way and Father McKenna found obstacles blocking his way. Financial circumstances made the one great object of his life, to be a priest, difficult of accomplishment. Undeterred, however, he went to work and from his scanty earnings, saved enough to pay his way through college. Although this unfortunate circumstance made him older than his college associates, it was not without its advantages and in it is plainly to be seen the finger of God disposing all things sweetly. It gave his character a persevering determination which stood by him in the accomplishment of every good work in his future years in the ministry. Moreover, it gave him an experience with men which he never could have got as a priest, and an insight into their needs which, without a doubt, is the reason why Father McKenna became the great Apostle of the Holy Name. Once a priest, no sacrifice was too great for God. Thoroughly imbued with the spirit of his Order, he knew well the futility of the ac-

tive without the contemplative life. Any one knowing Father McKenna's inner life, knew that he was essentially a man of prayer and contemplation. The fruits of his labor are conclusive evidences of his close communion with the Master.

The priest should be a man of study. This is a truth Father McKenna never forgot. Thoroughly conscious of the deficiencies with which his early lack of opportunity left him, he ever strove to perfect himself in order that he might the better transact the duties of his calling. He abhorred learning for learning's sake but he studied always that he might the better know and love the Master and bring others to His love. One could not help but be edified and inspired to hear the saintly old priest, even in the last days of his life, asking questions and seeking information, hoping still to bring light and encouragement to souls.

In no field of his activity did Father McKenna bring greater renown to himself and his Order than in the Christ-like work of preaching. With true apostolic zeal, he preached in season and out of season and everywhere—no place was too insignificant if there he could do good. Therein lies the secret of his success in preaching. He sought not to preach himself but Jesus Christ and Him Crucified. The people flocked to hear him for they recognized that from his lips flowed the words of eternal life. He did not seek to flatter them with sounding brass and tinkling cymbal. He had a message to convey and the people recognized it as divine.

Another powerful influence making Father McKenna an ideal priest of God was the great love he had for Mary, the Mother of his Master. She was his life, his sweetness and his hope. He had recourse to her in all his difficulties and recognized her as the cause of all his success. He preached her Rosary incessantly and practised what he preached, for no day passed, despite the extreme activity of his life, without offering her the fifteen mysteries. In the latter days of his life when the condition of his health restricted his activity, his rosary was always in his hand. It was his great desire that Mary should be better known and loved that prompted him to write "The Treasures of the Rosary," "The Crown of Mary," and to translate into English "The Secret of Sanctity." It was a well known fact in the life of Father McKenna that he never preached without at least some allusion to the Immaculate Mother of God.

Thus we have seen briefly only a few of the reasons why we who are so soon to be numbered among the anointed ones of God should make Father McKenna the model of our priestly lives. In so doing, we may be sure that we shall be rendering ourselves pleasing to God and when it comes time for us to lay down the sweet labors of life, our deathbed will also be surrounded with all the consolations of divine predilection and we may confidently expect to be welcomed into the realms of eternal joy.

—Pius Johannsen, O. P.

A CONSECRATION

In June, ah! fragrant month of all the year,
When sparkling dewdrops fairy buds enfold,
And gorgeous blossoms flood fields far and near
With beauty, and with peace, and love untold:
When feathered choirs chant in leafy loft,
And silvan streams with softest singings play,
And balmy skies caress white cloudlets soft—
Then gentle Earth falls on her knees to pray.

Ah! God of all! how blessed then to live!
To have in Nature's psalm of peace, a part!
With chastened heart to plead the grace to give
My love unstinted to the Sacred Heart!

—Justin McManus, O. P.