

## 60 Years a priest a Reflection on behalf of Fr Andrew April 2023

Living as a priest for 60 years involves many struggles as well as great and satisfying moments that fill a priest with great joy. For an Assumptionist, his religious community is always an anchor and a support that both challenges and opens him to the graces, goodness and mercy of God. Assumptionists recognise that it is in our relationships with each other that we learn about our relationship with God.

One priest celebrating his 85<sup>th</sup> birthday and his 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ordination, when asked how he felt about it, said, *"It wasn't always easy! There were some bitter, lonely times. Everyone in my ordination class left the priesthood, every one of them, and I was tempted too. But I stayed and, now, looking back over sixty years, I am not only happy with the way my life has turned out but also deeply, deeply grateful! (FR Andrew is nearly 87)*

Writing about priesthood, Donald Cozzens, the rector of a large American seminary, believes that the priesthood today is alive and well and that it is a life-giving option for any young or not so young man, not in spite of issues of abuse and other challenges but because of them. He connects the priesthood to its rightful origins: the Incarnation. Cozzens recognises that the incarnation is fraught with mess, misunderstanding and ambiguity because it enfleshes the love of a God who embraces both the bad with the good, the unredeemed with the redeemed. A God who loves us purely and simply, who meets us in our sin, and invariably ends up on a cross, looking compromised and hanging among thieves.

He concludes: *"The reason for hope lies in the apparent purification and maturation the priesthood has undergone in recent years. From their own pastoral experience, priests know something happens to the soul when it is subjected to ordeal upon ordeal, to unrelenting criticism, and to the anxiety that follows the loss of one's place and identity within the community. In the face of the historic abuse, a priest can choose either to surrender to despair or choose to hope against hope that life will go on, that mercy upon mercy will lift him up. Most priests have not given in to despair or lost their nerve. Their confidence has been shaken, to be sure, and their spirit bruised. But now, with their status diminished and reputation questioned, priests have turned with renewed poverty of soul to the sustaining mercy, love and the grace of God. In the midst of unprecedented crises, priests today stand as people without illusions, totally dependent on the power and strength of the Holy Spirit. In the truth of their circumstances, their humility inspires freedom and courage. The strongest reason for hope, of course, is their faith in the power of the Spirit to be with them through the darkest hours. For it is in the power of the Holy Spirit that they are reminded that nothing can separate them from Christ's abiding love and the saving promise of their creator God. In this abiding love and saving promise, they look, without fear, to the renewal and transformation of the priesthood. Behind the changing face of the priesthood remains the saving face of Jesus the Christ."*

The great mystery of priesthood is that it tries, however inadequately, to give a human face to a wondrous God who walks with us even when things aren't all pure and amidst mistakes and bad judgements, and wrong decisions. Quite rightly then, this is an awesome challenge!

**It has been this challenge that has tested, nurtured, sustained and proved the fidelity and the service with which Fr Andrew has lived his priesthood. Ad Multos Annos! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!**

**A Catholic Priest and a Rabbi were chatting one day** when the conversation turned to a discussion of job descriptions and promotion.

"What do you have to look forward to in way of a promotion in your job?" asked the Rabbi.

"Well, I'm next in line for the Monsignor's job." replied the Priest.

"Yes, and then what?" asked the Rabbi.<br>

"Well, next I can become Bishop." said the Priest.

"Yes, and then?" asked the Rabbi.

"If I work really hard and do a good job as Bishop, it's possible for me to become an Archbishop." said the Priest.

"O.K., then what?" asked the Rabbi.

The Priest, beginning to get a bit exasperated replied, "With some luck and real hard work, maybe I can even become a Cardinal."

"And then?" asked the Rabbi.

The Priest is really starting to get irritated now and replies, "With lots and lots of luck and some really difficult work and if I'm in the right places at the right times and play my political games just right, maybe, just maybe, I could be elected Pope."

"Yes, and then what?" asked the Rabbi.

"Good grief!" shouted the Priest. "What do you expect? To become, GOD?"

"Well," said the Rabbi, "One of our boys made it!"