

Foreword

“Joy,” claims French philosopher Leon Bloy, “is the infallible sign of God’s presence.”

One would thus look for a palpable spirit of joy in those very men called by the Church to be “signs of God’s presence,” her priests. And, if recent studies are correct, priests are indeed happy men: Over 90 percent of them report high satisfaction with their call and their ministry and “would do it all again” if the calendar were turned back. That’s very good news.

The bad news is that, according to the same research, the public *perception* is that priests are not joyful, that the priesthood is in a life-threatening crisis, and that many priests, while internally happy, come off as crabs and malcontents.

Lord knows there are abundant reasons for this: the horror and heavy weight of the abuse scandal, the carping from fringes on both the left and right, and the declining numbers of clergy. It is very tough to be a good and faithful priest, yet the great majority are, and almost all are happy.

Father Stephen Rossetti, a most effective and happy priest of the presbyterate of the Diocese of Syracuse, and the president of the Saint Luke Institute, dedicated to the healing of hurting, sick, and struggling priests, has a fifty-yard line seat on the priesthood. He is in a unique position to speak to his brother priests and to the millions who care about them, about the “joy of priesthood.”

The book you are about to begin will not let you down. Father Rossetti deftly describes the nobility of the priestly

call, yet also all that degrades it; he tells us eloquently of the triumph of grace, yet also of the crushing potency of sin; he lets us know why priests smile so much, yet also why you will at times catch them crying; he tells us what makes effective priests tick, and what destroys others.

Any priest who wants to appreciate more fully the power of his call and his identity, while realistically reassessing the temptations and perils he faces, will thank Father Rossetti for this timely, compelling spiritual reading. Anyone who loves the Church and her priests will benefit as well from this perceptive treatment of “those mysterious priests,” as Fulton Sheen described them thirty years ago.

And we will all come away more firmly convinced of the classical Catholic dictum that “grace builds on nature.” For what Father Rossetti valiantly believes is that the unfailing power, awe, mercy, and strength of the grace of holy orders, blended with the wholesome, healthy, self-knowing, mature nature of a man humbly open to that grace, produces a chemistry that combines God and man, heaven and earth, saint and sinner, rise and fall, life and death—*a priest*, a man of joy.

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Priestly Life and Ministry
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Year of the Eucharist