



St. Anne  
CATHOLIC  
COMMUNITY

## January 30, 2011 The Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time

*"...God chose the foolish of the world to shame the wise...so that no human being might boast before God."—1Corinthians 1: 26-29*

Dear Friends;

In a marvelous book, *The Catholic Imagination*, Fr. Andrew Greeley explores the characteristics that make up the Catholic world-view. He examines attitudes found in art, literature, movies, and polling data to discover what he calls the "Catholic imagination."

One of the images that he explores is the image of the "whiskey-priest." What he means by this term is the image of the priest who is also a sinner, found in many writers (Edwin O'Connor, J. F. Powers, Graham Green, George Bernanos, Chaucer, Shakespeare and more).

Greeley feels that the best novel ever written about a priest is Graham Greene's *The Power and the Glory*. Greeley says; "The whiskey priest is a weak and sinful man, a drunk and a lecher and a coward. And yet...and yet...the glory of the priesthood—the dignity of the role this unworthy man occupies—overwhelms his weakness and makes him a martyr and a saint. Any priest who does not feel that he is a weak man driven to virtue of which he is not really capable by the power and the glory of his sacred function is grossly deficient in self-awareness."

In his examination of the data Greeley finds that Catholics have no illusions about their priests. No one feels that they have to pretend that though their priests hold a sacred role that they could do no wrong. Greeley says this heresy that priests could do no wrong "is a recent phenomenon associated most notoriously with scandals resulting from the Church's foolish attempt to cover-up for sex-abusing priests."

We do not have in the Catholic Tradition a cult of personality. Cult of personalities is reserved for heavenly persons—Jesus, Mary, the angels and saints. Catholicism recognizes no sacred persons—not priests, bishops, religious superiors or even popes. There are not sacred persons but sacred functional roles, individuals who hold these offices deserve respect but not worship.

The cult of the pope that is currently promoted by the curia (Pope's bureaucracy), only goes back to the middle of the nineteenth century and is inappropriate—especially given some of the men who have been pope over the centuries. Like the rest of us popes are human and have their limitations and make mistakes.

Recently, Pope Benedict has decided to beatify Pope John Paul II. Traditionally there have not been many popes declared saints. It has also been long standing custom for popes not to canonize other popes so easily, lest the papacy turns into a mutual admiration society. Lately this custom has been set aside, with a rash of papal beatifications—Pius IX, John XXIII and now John Paul II. There was wisdom in waiting a century or more before declaring papal sanctity.

The announcement of John Paul II's beatification (May 1, 2011) is most rapid. It is not without controversy. John Paul II did many wonderful things to promote the life of the Church, and proclaim the rights of all peoples in the secular realm. In the Church he seemed to take us from the vision of Vatican II to a more authoritarian style centralizing all authority in Rome.

His biggest blind spot was the child sex abuse scandal especially in relation to the founder of the Legionaires of Christ, Marciel Maciel y Degollado. This scandal is still with us and it would seem to me it would have been better to wait and let history be the judge. John Paul's beatification will not silence the controversy and the timing seems too political.

Like all of us, John Paul was a mix of goodness and grace, faults and failings. His sanctity does not mean he was perfect but that God's grace worked in him. It is time for the hierarchy to throw off the Counter-Reformation image of the Church as "Perfect Society" and claim the more biblical image (promoted by Vatican II) of the Church as a "pilgrim people" who struggle along our way to the Kingdom. It is not our cleverness, control or triumphalism that makes us Holy but our humility and God's grace. "Whoever boasts should boast in the Lord."

Peace,

*Fr Ron*