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The Visitation

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Apostolic Priesthood: What Will it Take?

By Fr. Sylvester Nanki, Ghana Fraternity

The idea of an *"apostolic priesthood"* is often used by both Catholics and evangelical Christians, but Msgr. James Shea—drawing from his book *From Christendom to Apostolic Mission* (2020) uses it to mean a new **mindset in ministry**: a way of thinking and acting that sees Christianity as a transforming power confronting an increasingly non-Christian world. It contrasts with the *Christendom mindset*, which assumes that society already reflects Christian values and therefore needs only to maintain them. Shea argues that we now live in an **apostolic age**, not a Christendom one, and the Church must rediscover its missionary spirit to meet this challenge.

1. **Christendom and Apostolic Modes** - Every era has a dominant "vision" or ethos that shapes its culture. The Church has historically operated under two broad models:

•**Christendom Mode**: when the surrounding culture supports Christian beliefs and institutions. The Church's task is largely maintenance: nurturing the faith of believers and preserving existing traditions.

•**Apostolic Mode**: when culture is indifferent or hostile to Christianity. The Church must evangelize from the margins, proclaiming the Gospel as something new, distinct, and often countercultural.

Shea emphasizes that Christendom once the norm in Christian Europe and the West no longer exists. Many Catholics, however, still think and minister as if it does. This outdated mentality leaves the Church unprepared for today's secular world. The essential task, therefore, is **conversion of the mind**: learning to see and think as apostles in mission territory rather than as caretakers of an established faith.

2. **Strengths and Weaknesses of Each Mode** - In the Christendom model, centuries of evangelization aligned culture with the Gospel, producing Christian laws, values, and customs. The Church's missionary success thus created a need for "maintenance," or as Pope Paul VI described it, "to deepen and purify the faith of believers." But this cultural success brought spiritual complacency. Christianity became "commonplace" and lost its radical edge.

Many Catholics today inherit their faith without understanding or conviction. Their religion is cultural, not personal. Some no longer believe in the Real Presence in the Eucharist or view confession and sacrifice as meaningful. Others see the Church as just another moral organization, influenced more by secular humanism than divine revelation. The Enlightenment's emphasis on human reason and philanthropy, while noble, often replaced faith in God with faith in humanity. Shea notes that hypocrisy is the great sin of Christendom culture, while the youngest generation (Gen Z) seeks authenticity above all something they rarely find in an institutionalized Church.

In Christendom, priests risk becoming bureaucrats or administrators rather than apostles. Pastoral life can devolve into system maintenance, conflict avoidance, and routine service delivery. Evangelization loses urgency, and zeal becomes the domain of a few "missionary nostalgics."

By contrast, the **apostolic mode** is alive with missionary intensity. The Church knows it stands apart from the dominant culture, so faith becomes deeper, more joyful, and visibly transformative. Believers experience Christianity as liberation and power. Priests and lay leaders exhibit purity of intention, holiness, and courage. Suffering, even martyrdom, is expected. The Church becomes visibly countercultural an intentional community of light in a dark world. However, this can also bring temptations to elitism, judgmentalism, or sectarian withdrawal. Apostolic faith must balance truth with charity, zeal with humility.

3. **The Present Context: A Post-Christendom Church** - Msgr. Shea insists that we are now fully in an **apostolic era**. Modern Western culture no longer supports Christian moral foundations. Evidence abounds:

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Fraternity Financial Report

Monthly Budget:
$4,750.00
Actual Donations:
$998.00
Budget Deficit:
$3,752.00

Current as of September 30, 2025.

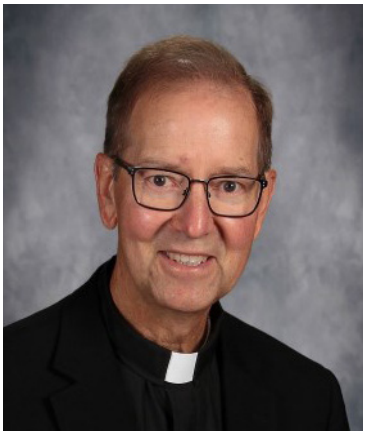
"Throne Room" prayer describes a style of prayer encouraged by Fraternity of Priests. It is based on Psalm 100:4 which reads, "Enter His gates with thanksgiving; enter his courts with songs of praise. Give thanks to him and bless His Name." We draw near to God's throne by acknowledging what He has done for us (with thanksgiving) and by acknowledging who He is (with praise for His Person).

In some ways, thanking God is at the heart of prayer. From the air we breathe to the vocations we have, and everything that sustains us in between, is a gift from God. As Catholic Christians, we are especially grateful for our faith in Jesus Christ, the graces that inundate our lives through the sacraments and charisms of the Holy Spirit and the hope of eternal life with God that we have.

Gratitude was a theme woven into the letters of St. Paul: *In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus. (1 Thessalonians 5:18) And let the peace of Christ control your hearts, the peace into which you were also called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as in all wisdom you teach and admonish one another, singing songs, hymns, and spiritual songs, with gratitude in your hearts to God. Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (Colossians 3:15-17)…by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. (Philippians 4:6)*

The early Church recognized the centrality of giving thanks in the life of the Church. Noting that at the Last Supper Jesus gave thanks in due time thanksgiving became one of the titles of the Church's central act of worship. Eucharist means thanksgiving.

The writings of the saints perpetuate this theme: *St. Teresa of Avila*: "In all created things discern the providence and wisdom of God, and in all things give Him thanks." *St. John Paul II*: "Remember the past with gratitude. Live the present with enthusiasm. Look forward to the future with confidence." *St. Gianna Beretta Molla*: "The secret of happiness is to live moment by moment and to thank God for what He is sending us every day in His goodness." *Bl. Solanus Casey*: "Thank God ahead of time." *St. Margaret Mary Alacoque*: "Would that I could exhaust myself in acts of thanksgiving and gratitude towards this Divine Heart, for the great favor He shows us." *St. Josemaria Escriva*: "Get used to lifting your heart to God, in acts of thanksgiving, many times a day. Because he gives you this and that. Because you have been despised. Because you haven't what you need or because you have. Thank him for everything, because everything is good." He knew who was in charge: God! *Saint Mary Euphrasia*: "Gratitude is the memory of the heart."



In the United States we have a national holiday dedicated to Thanksgiving. May this day and every day for all Christians, overflow with Thanksgiving to God. We want to draw near His Throne.

In Christ,

Fr. Bob Franco

Fr. Bob Franco

PS: Thank you, donors and prayer warriors, for all you do for priests.

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Catholic youth abandoning the faith, Catholic schools and universities losing their Catholic identity, and dwindling vocations to priesthood and religious life. Religious orders shrink, parishes struggle, and Catholic institutions often mirror secular norms.

The deeper problem is not merely moral decline but a **strategic mismatch** the Church continues to operate in Christendom mode, using structures built for a society that no longer exists. Shea writes that much of the Church "is compromised by the ruling vision of the wider culture or using outmoded strategies." The key challenge is to reengage both believers and nonbelievers with the truths of the Gospel through fresh imagination, faith, and courage.

4. **Eight Pastoral Strategies for an Apostolic Age** - Msgr. Shea proposes **eight** strategies to guide the Church in rediscovering her missionary identity.

(1) **Develop an Apostolic Attitude -** The Church must consciously accept that we live in apostolic times and trust in the power of the Gospel. Christians must rediscover the joy of conversion—believing that holiness leads to true happiness and obedience to God brings freedom. Faith cannot be inherited but must be personally chosen. "Hereditary Catholics," attached only sentimentally to their identity, need renewal through personal encounter with Christ.

(2) **Challenge Secular Analyses of the Church -** While sociological data may describe trends, the Church is not just a human organization. Its endurance comes from the Holy Spirit. Thus, the Church must not succumb to despair or fatalism about decline but trust the hidden work of grace and prayer.

(3) **Retool Church Institutions -** Catholic institutions schools, hospitals, parishes must be reoriented for evangelization, not mere service or maintenance. In a secular environment, these institutions must actively resist cultural conformity. If they operate as before, they will quickly lose their inner Christian spirit. The Church must consciously preserve its distinct identity, using its institutions as instruments of witness rather than social acceptance.

(4) **Incarnate the Christian Vision -** Faith must be embodied in visible, tangible forms rituals, community life, art, and liturgy. Christianity is a sacramental faith: divine truth becomes real through concrete expressions. "Ideas not incarnated soon lose their hold on our minds," Shea writes. Therefore, Catholics must build cultural and spiritual "architecture" that reflects their countercultural faith, especially through reverent liturgy and practices that make God visible.

(5) **Renew Priestly Life and Formation** - Priesthood must be redefined as a vocation of missionary discipleship, not a career. Formation should include not only theology but also personal healing, intellectual conversion, and "cultural detox." Priests need strong fraternal communities and shared apostolic purpose to thrive in a hostile culture. Ongoing formation after ordination must focus on holiness, joy, and clarity of identity, ensuring priests remain shepherds and witnesses rather than administrators.

(6) **Allocate Resources for Mission** - Resources must be directed toward evangelization, even if results are slow or uncertain. The Church should support innovative missionary initiatives, especially those reaching the unchurched or hostile sectors of society. Like yeast in dough, the Holy Spirit works through small beginnings that gradually transform culture. Apostolic stewardship means investing in conversion, not comfort.

(7) **Shepherd New Converts Wisely** - True conversions especially among youth often bring great enthusiasm but also potential excesses: rigidity, rivalry, or doctrinal confusion. Pastors must guide new believers with patience and discernment, channeling zeal into mature discipleship rather than extinguishing it with suspicion or control.

(8) **Evangelize Through Witness -** Modern people are more persuaded by holiness than by argument. Pope Paul VI's insight still holds: "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers." The Church must therefore evangelize through visible love, integrity, and self-sacrifice. Figures like Mother Teresa and the Missionaries of Charity embody this incarnate faith—proclaiming the Gospel not by words alone but through radiant lives of charity.

Conclusion - The **apostolic priesthood** is not a new structure but a renewal of the Church's original identity—missionary, prophetic, and holy. It calls for priests and laity to abandon maintenance mentalities and embrace evangelization with courage and joy. This transformation begins with the **conversion of the mind**, continues through institutional renewal, and flourishes in authentic witness.

Priests who live in union with Christ, sustained by the Spirit, will make the Gospel credible again. The task is demanding but filled with hope: by renewing hearts and minds, the Church can once more become a radiant sign of God's presence in a secular world.

Please send us your prayer intentions:_____

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THANK YOU FOR PRAYING FOR A PRIEST EACH DAY!

December 2025						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1 Rev. John Kiley *Boston*	2 Rev. Maurice Larochelle *Boston*	3 Rev. Jurgen Liias *Boston*	4 **For the souls of our deceased FOP members**	5 **For prayer requests received**	6 **For our Holy Father, Pope Leo XIV**
7 Rev. Paul McManus *Boston*	8 Rev. Thomas Reilly *Boston*	9 Rev. Roarke Traynor *Boston*	10 Rev. Chris Wallace *Boston*	11 Rev. Daniel Zinger *Boston*	12 Rev. Donald Roy *Burlington*	13 Rev. Andy Bord *Cardiff*
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28 Rev. Richard Goellen *Fargo*	29 Rev. Dale Kinzler *Fargo*	30 Rev. Donald Leiphon *Fargo*	31 Rev. Gary Luiten *Fargo*			

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A PRAYER FOR PRIESTS

O Jesus, Eternal High Priest, live in (name of priest), act in him, speak in and through him. Think your thoughts in his mind, love through his heart. Give him your own disposition and feelings. Teach, lead and guide him always. Correct, enlighten and expand his thoughts and behavior. Possess his soul, take over his entire personality and life. Replace him with yourself. Incline him to constant adoration and thanksgiving; pray in and through him. Let him live in you and keep him in this intimate union always.

O Mary, Immaculate Conception, Mother of Jesus and Mother of priests, pray and intercede for (.....). Amen.

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