
"Anybody With Guts Can Apply."

We're not interested in the semantics of "guts." It's a masculine word; most men understand what it means, offensive to pious philological ears or not. From a Catholic newspaper out east comes the following vocational autobiography:

I'm a priest. And I like it. I don't suppose everybody would. A lot of people think you must be just a bit queer to be a priest. But I don't know whether that's true. I know one priest who played big league ball before he entered and another who played the piano for Paul Whiteman. Father George Kerr was ordained a couple of years ago. He was captain of the Boston College team that beat Tennessee in the Sugar Bowl and an All-American guard. The New York Police Department boasts of 10 priests who were ex-cops. Almost 2,000 ex-service men are now studying for the priesthood--fellows who climbed Hill 532 outside Bizerte, who sweated out jungle fever in New Guinea and who walked into Cassino and Normandy. It wasn't a pretty walk and not many pretty boys made it.

Some people figure a priest is a fellow who never did like girls and probably hates babies. He's not much of a priest if he hates anybody. His Leader, Christ loved girls--oncethe Pharisees were going to stone a bad girl, and would have if Christ hadn't become her champion. And as for loving babies, you can't even be a priest if you don't love babies--and Christ was the One who said that.

I don't think I'm particularly different from other American men. When I was a kid, I saw two paths open. They were both good--one led to marriage and a flock of youngsters; the other led to the priesthood. Either way I had to give up something; either way I got something in return. I don't remember any "call." I certainly wasn't a cherub with my hair parted in the middle and a heavenly smile on my face--it would have been better if I were. I knew how to fix bicycles before I knew how to conjugate a Latin verb and I knew more about peddling papers than I did about geometry.

What A Priest Told Me.

"God needs men. The whole world is going to ruin; and Christ needs men who are willing to sacrifice everything they want to help Him get more of what He wants. Anybody with guts can apply." I did apply. It was tough all right. Tougher than I had expected. I used to spend nights wondering if I wasn't crazy for trying. I used to say to myself, "Listen pal, there are 35,000 priests in the U.S.; they made it."

After a while I found myself studying theology and thinking about minor orders and subdeaconship. How the time flew; fellows I used to go around with started getting married, having children, and I was still a schoolboy. The studies never got much easier; living together, going down to more or less the same kind of meals all the time, getting up before the sun, going to the chapel for prayer and meditation, and sitting at a desk studying--they never were easy.

And then one day I went home to our Cathedral and there 14 of us knelt before the big altar. . . We all heard the Bishop say in Latin, "You are a priest forever!" He anointed our hands with oil and his assistants wrapped them with linen cloths. Then it was all over and we went out to give our first blessings to our mothers and dads; most of them were crying and like dopes we started, too. But we weren't sad--just full of happiness and gratitude. The next day I said my first Mass and as I said "This is My Body," I shook like a leaf. That was God I was handling, calling down from heaven, putting on people's tongues. . .

It's not for everybody; it's not for anybody. But don't ever get the idea that if you're going to be a priest, you're giving God something. I had that idea once. I have a different idea now. I got the most wonderful gift ever given to a man on the face of the earth. I ask everybody I know to pray I'll always try to be worthy of it.