

The Beautiful Habit of the Priest

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It is a great inspiration to see in Garabandal the priests -- enthusiastic, smiling and obviously keen to hear what the Blessed Virgin has to say.

When one views the many photographs taken at Garabandal over forty years ago, it is impossible not to notice the many priests present. The captions usually do not name every person in the photograph but we can recognize the priests by their clerical garb. A great inspiration it is too — to see the priests enthusiastic, smiling and obviously keen to hear what the Blessed Virgin has to say.



Priests in the clerical garbs surround the four Garabandal visionaries in ecstasy.

The visionaries had the special gift of being able to recognize priests dressed in civilian clothes. However, this was a gift given to them alone and the general public present did not know that they were in the presence of a priest.

Today a priest may or may not choose to wear his habit. He may not feel comfortable on certain occasions and decide to wear civilian clothes. He is still the same person, a priest, to himself and to God. However, when he goes out in public he appears to be one of the 'crowd'. *"Keep them I pray Thee, dearest Lord. Keep them for they are Thine — Thy Priests whose lives burn out before Thy consecrated shrine. Keep them for they are in the world, though from the world apart."*

A married couple wear a wedding ring to show their love and fidelity for each other and this can also be a deterrent to someone who may be attracted to either of them. A priest wearing civilian clothes may not have this defence — *"When earthly pleasures tempt, allure, — shelter them, in Thy heart."*

Two true stories come to mind. The first was when Fr. X visited a patient in hospital. As he was walking along the corridor he passed two women who were having a conversation, one being a lapsed Catholic. As he passed by, the lapsed Catholic commented to the other, "What a beautiful young priest. It is so good to see a young man giving his life to God — and unashamedly wearing his habit". This priest spoke no words but just the fact that he was wearing his habit gave public witness to Christ and His Church.

My husband related the second story to me. We were talking about the homeless as we passed a couple handing out breakfast from the back of their van, early on a Sunday morning. He recalled an incident when he was in Canada. There was a group of obviously homeless youth sitting around a table at a coffee shop and there in the group was a priest. This visual impact again gave public witness to Christ and His Church.

In these instances the priests concerned didn't know whom they touched simply by wearing their habits. Pope John Paul stated in one of his talks in 1979, "I say: rejoice to be witnesses to Christ in the modern world. Do not hesitate to be recognizable, identifiable in the streets as men and women who have consecrated their lives to God and have given up everything worldly to follow Christ. Believe that contemporary men and women set values on visible signs of consecration of your lives. People need signs and reminders of God in the modern secular city, which has few reminders of God left. So do not help the trend towards 'taking God off the streets' by adapting secular modes of dress and behaviour yourselves!" *"Keep them and comfort them in hours of loneliness and pain. When all their life of sacrifice for souls seems but in vain."*

One particular priest recounted that on walking through the city wearing his habit, he noticed that sometimes a person walking in the opposite direction saw him coming and crossed to the other side of the street! Such incidences would take courage on the part of the priest to persevere. *"Keep them and O remember Lord they have no one but Thee. Yet they have only human hearts, with human frailty."*

In Garabandal when the angel gave the girls Holy Communion and they queried how this could be, as only a priest could consecrate Hosts, they were told this was so and that the Hosts were taken from Tabernacles around the world. A priest is consecrated to God and is therefore a very special person. We, therefore, are very privileged in being able to pray for and support our Priests. *"Keep them as spotless as the Host, that daily, they caress — Their every thought and word and deed deign, dearest Lord, to bless."*

Just a little story: The old man looked up at the clock, it was 5:30 pm. He walked over to the window, as dusk approached and outside the wind howled and the rain fell as it had all day. A storm was brewing. It was bitterly cold outside but the fireplace was warm and inviting. He had a good view of the lighthouse from his window and he knew what he needed to do but was tempted not to light it just for one night. He walked to the door where his raincoat hung on a hook and slowly put it on. Opening the door he felt a cold rush of air hit him like a cold wave of water.

As he walked as fast as he could towards the lighthouse, he wondered if this nightly exercise of lighting the lighthouse was futile. Not many ships came by this way anymore and he would probably catch a death of cold for nothing. Reaching the lighthouse he opened the old door. The wintry weather was playing havoc with his old joints and he felt every bone in his body as he slowly climbed the shaky stairs. Reaching the top he lit the light and made the slow descent muttering to himself — those kids from the town will more than likely defy the weather and throw stones at the light, breaking yet another glass. Finally, he was back in the warm comfort of his room and made himself something to eat before retiring for the night.

The storm became increasingly worse as the old man slept and wasn't aware of the ship that had steered off

course. There was the lighthouse shining brightly and the captain managed to avert the disaster which would have been imminent had it not been for the efforts of an old man who now slept peacefully!

Lord we pray for our priests, our lighthouses in today's darkness.

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