

The Cassock

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I first starting wearing the cassock one year after I was ordained a Priest and I have been wearing it ever since. Some of my brother Priests joke with me that I sleep in my cassock. I often remind them that I don't wear the cassock when I am skiing or playing golf.

One Sunday while I was walking across the parking lot of my first assignment and making my way to the church I heard one of the parishioners call my name. After he greeted me another parishioner who was assisting him direct cars in the parking lot shouted from the other end of the lot, "Father, why do you always wear a cassock?" Before I could respond, the other parishioner yelled back, "I know why Father wears the cassock, because he loves being a Priest!" I could not have said it any better myself...yes, I love being a Priest. Wearing a cassock is just another sign of the beauty and dignity of the Priesthood. It doesn't make the priest holy or virtuous, no, we have to work at that like everyone else.

At one of our monthly Priestly gatherings with the Bishop, as I was passing by the Bishop he gently approached me and in a soft Fatherly voice where only I could hear him, said to me, "wearing a cassock is like wearing a bullseye on your back". At times I am reminded of those caring words by our Bishop and also the many times I have heard him encourage his Priests to wear the cassock. There are many aspects of the Priesthood that require courage, perhaps there is also a degree of courage this is required in our times as Priest to wear the cassock. The cassock sends a strong loving message that we are Priests, consecrated, that is, set apart from the world to give ourselves to Christ and to witness to the world to look to the things of Heaven. What a great and awesome

gift God has given to His Church in the Ordained Priesthood. A friend of mine a saintly woman and mystic, Eileen George, who gave numerous Priests retreats and often said, "2000 years ago our Lord walked the face of the earth but now it is through His Ordained Priests that He lives, moves, and has His being". Sadly, Eileen George left us on Mother's Day, May 14, 2017.

Several months ago, one of my Priest friends asked if I was interested in taking a pilgrimage/vacation in Canada. I was able to get some time off and so we decided to drive up to Canada and visit the holy shrines. We began our Canadian trip in Quebec City, visiting St. Anne de Beaupre, then onto Three Rivers, visiting Notre Dame du Cap, to Montreal, visiting St. Joseph's Oratory, and finally ending at the Martyrs' Shrine in Midland, Ontario. There were numerous other stops along the way.

As we were making our way north into Canada we decided that we would wear our cassocks throughout the trip...A bold decision knowing that the clerics in Canada rarely wear their Priestly garb and the growing secular culture that exists there. Surprisingly, throughout our 2 week pilgrimage/vacation in Canada we were only aware of the many blessings that God granted us through our wearing of the cassock. We were approached by numerous people in the shrines asking us to bless their sacramentals, to hear their confession, and to give them a blessing. The joyful experiences of ministering to God's holy people was not limited to the shrines. It seemed that every time we ventured out to do some sightseeing or eat at a restaurant someone would approach us to ask if we were really Priests or for some kind of blessing or prayers. On several occasions the locals informed us that the Priests in their diocese do not wear clerics in public but they were so excited to meet Priests wearing cassocks and so thankful that we did.

There was one morning that I remember in Ontario. We were up at 5:00 am driving on Route 60 through Algonquin State Park in

looking to see if we could spot a Moose in the wild. God is so good that He allowed us to see one alongside the highway feeding and making his way through the marshy grass areas. I never tire of seeing the beauty in God's creation especially a Moose! After we finished our successful early morning venture to spot a Moose we headed to the closest place for some breakfast. (Looking for Moose can really increase your appetite) While we were seated at the restaurant and looking over the menu, a woman from a nearby table came and asked if she could join us for a few minutes. She was very upset and close to tears. She said that when she saw us enter the restaurant in our cassocks she wanted to touch them believing that the power of Jesus would come out and heal her friend who was suffering from cancer and undergoing chemo treatments. She even asked if she could touch our garments while at the table with her. She went on to tell us how her friend was struggling with her faith and that she was constantly praying for her. The Priest that I was with said to her there is great healing power in the Sacraments especially in the Eucharist and Reconciliation and recommended that she encourage her friend to return to the Sacraments. He then invited her to join us as we sat at our table in the middle of a crowded restaurant and prayed together for her friend. When the woman left our table she was very grateful and you could see God's peace in her. As we were getting ready to leave and pay our bill the waitress approached us and said, "Fathers, someone has taken care of your bill". People love their Priests and they love the Priesthood.

When we finally arrived at the Martyrs' Shrine in Midland, Ontario we met a man there who was in charge of the pilgrims and he was so delighted to meet two Priests wearing cassocks. He shared with us of a story that his local Priest told him. This Priest friend of his was asked to assist at an exorcism and while he was present he

heard the voice of the evil one say, “I hate that cassock”. Another reason why it is good for Priests to wear the cassock because the devil hates it. And why does he hate it, because it sends a powerful message of the Priesthood. The cassock does not make us holy, no, we have to work at the spiritual life and growing in holiness. St. Paul reminds us to put on the armor of Christ. We put on the armor of Christ by celebrating Mass reverently every day, by being faithful to the Liturgy of the Hours, by making a Holy Hour each day, and by praying the Rosary. And another layer of that armor of Christ is by wearing the cassock. I encourage our seminarians and brother Priests to wear the cassock because it is a powerful sign of the beauty and dignity of the Priesthood.