***“It’s not what I do - it’s what I am.”***

“I was born to a different Dad.” My wife and I are blessed to have three amazing children, all of whom have been brought up in the Faith, obviously. And while they hold to the Faith, they each also have an incredible sense of humor. Years ago, our older two would tease our youngest child with funny thoughts, but one day our youngest daughter looked at her older sister and brother and said, “You know that I have a different father than you have.” They were not yet accustomed to her putting in such an opening shot, and so as they pondered what she had said, she went on to say, “You see you were born to Mr. and Mrs. Ackerman. I was born to Father and Mrs. Ackerman.” They were dumbfounded. She was correct. She was born after I was ordained as a Deacon and then as a priest. For some this is just a cute and whimsical statement she made, but all three understood. “Dad is a priest. It is not what he ‘does’ - it’s what he is.” They understood what the Church has taught for two millennia: priesthood is not “functional;” it is “ontological.” That is, a priest can’t simply stop being a priest even when he is “retired” or doesn’t function in his priestly vocation. Recently someone looked at a picture of the cake served at my ordination: Tu es Sacerdos in aeternum. “You are a priest forever.”

I am currently writing an article that primarily addresses “who can be a priest,” and so I will limit my few words in this pondering to “what is a priest?” Before one can even begin to discuss with any integrity “who can be a priest” one must note that it is impossible to answer that question without stating what a priest is. This is particularly important because a major stumbling block within some Communions and Denominations is the issue of function versus ontology. If I believed the more modern perspective, historically speaking, that priesthood is simply a function, then I would think that just about anyone could be ordained as a priest. I am reminded of Archbishop Geoffrey Fisher who tells us regarding our Faith, that “We have no doctrine of our own. We only possess the Catholic doctrine of the Catholic Church enshrined in the Catholic creeds, and those creeds we hold without addition or diminution.” As he wrote this in 1951, as the Archbishop of Canterbury, he would in just a brief period of time be placing a Crown on the head of the new Monarch, Elizabeth II. We do not have our own priesthood, nor do we have the authority to change the priesthood. The priest represents Christ in a particular way in terms of the relationship with the Church as the Bride of Christ. I will say more about this in the article I am currently writing.

If we believe, in our Tradition, that we embrace the truth of the Vincentian Canon, which articulates the threefold test of Catholicity “What has been believed everywhere, always, and by all,” then we must apply that to every proposed change to the Faith not on the basis of pure logic, nor on the basis of rapidly changing socio-political opinions that are evolving and are subjective in nature, but rather on the basis of theological principle. As it relates to the priesthood, it is a gift given not to be changed but to be embraced. And when that gift is received there is a permanent change in the recipient.

I thank our children for knowing and believing that, and in spite of the fact that there are other points of view, for most of us we simply embrace what has been handed down to us. “Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.” St. Jude 1:3