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Privilege and Honor by Carl E Beyer

I was sitting in church last Sunday observing all the people that make the mass a smooth community gathering when the word “privilege” struck me upside the head. The best definition that I found was at Wikipedia.

Wikipedia definition: A privilege - etymologically "private law" or law relating to a specific individual - is a special entitlement or immunity granted by a government or other authority to a restricted group, either by birth or on a conditional basis. A privilege can be revoked in some cases. In modern democracies, a *privilege* is conditional and granted only after birth. By contrast, a *right* is an inherent, irrevocable entitlement held by all citizens or all human beings from birth. Miscellaneous privileges, e.g. the old common law privilege to title deeds, may still exist, although it is of little relevance today.

To condense this down I will use the standard that a “privilege” is granted while a “right” is inherited. And to further convolute the subject, society is starting to slip into using the word privilege incorrectly. I have done so myself. We may hear someone say “It has been a privilege to serve with you.” When worded that way it means that they were granted the opportunity to serve with you while they may have disliked you and thought you were dishonest. The correct verbiage would be “It has been a privilege and an honor to serve with you.” Now not only were they granted the opportunity to serve with you but they were honored by that privilege.

One of the highest privileges that a lay-person can be granted is to serve as a Eucharistic Minister. Oops, I hear Monsignor telling me that it is now officially called “Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion.” We will use EM for short since EM can also stand for Extraordinary Minister. EMs as defined by St. Thomas Aquinas Church and as being adopted by St. John Vianney Mission Church should be people that have served faithfully in other volunteer positions. This is a position that Monsignor does not want people requesting to serve in. I know when I was asked to be an EM I felt very unworthy to serve in that position. Then I found out that is exactly how everyone should feel. How can any lay-person be worthy of being entrusted with our Lord’s body? As poor sinful mortals we are granted this privilege to assist the priest in the distribution of the Eucharist. If, while performing this task you do not feel honored, then I would invite you to relinquish the title of EM.

The next time you go up to receive Holy Communion think about the highest privilege that anyone in the church can receive. I know some of you are saying things like “serve as a Priest”; “serve as a Bishop”; “serve as Pope”. While these are very honorable and privileged positions there is a higher privilege that so many of us take for granted. This privilege is the receiving of the Eucharist. Quick, if you were offered two choices which would you choose? The first choice is to live in a cardboard box and receive the Eucharist daily. The second choice is to live in a mansion and never receive the Eucharist. What would you choose? I personally would be hoping for one of those big refrigerator boxes. What could possibly be a higher privilege than receiving our Lord in the Most Holy Eucharist? So when I look around the church I see people serving in privileged roles, but most of all I see a privileged class of people who receive the Eucharist.

While I have singled out the EM’s position as a high privilege this is not to disparage other volunteer positions. I would like to review these other positions for your consideration either now or in the future. The most important part of any volunteering is to realize you would be privileged to serve and that all positions serving the Lord are a high honor.

The first honor I had to serve our Lord in church was in being asked to bring up the gifts.

This privilege involves parishioners in the preparation of the Eucharist. The rite of carrying up the gifts continues the custom of ancient times when the faithful brought bread and wine for the liturgy from their homes. The only requirement for this honor is a reverence for the Eucharist.

One of the positions closest to my heart is the position of Usher. I am honored to be a part of the St. John Vianney Ushers with their high standards. No grumpy people need apply for this position. Requirements are simply a love and respect for your fellow man. An usher should be someone who has the welcoming smile and firm handshake that you look forward to on Sundays.

The position of Liturgical Ministers is one I respect highly. These individuals get up in front of everyone to read the Holy Word of our Lord. Requirements are to be able to speak clearly, have no fear of public speaking and have a high respect for the Biblical words.

Sacristans are those working quietly in the background with little recognition. They are essential to the mass. I was reminded of this last Thursday when I found Gerri cleaning and polishing the Altar. Sacristans are those special people that assist the priest before and after the masses. Requirements are to be a tidy and structured person to maintain the high standards of the Altar.

Altar Servers are those special young people who assist the priest on the Altar. This is a great learning experience where the young can gain respect for the mass. Usually parents volunteer their children for this position but young people may volunteer themselves.

With Coz leading the charge we have our great Grounds & Interior Cleaning crew. They keep our Parish Hall and grounds looking great for our masses. This is one of those positions that allow you to work quietly in the background while accomplishing a vital task for the church.

Another very important privilege is serving as a CCD teacher. To teach and inspire the young to love our Lord can only be describe as a privilege. Love of children and teaching are the requirements for this position.

Our Welcoming Committee volunteers are important to make new parish member feel welcomed to our church. You need to love people and the church to serve in this position. Positive people with a love for our church meet the requirements for this position.

And now, for my favorite topic, food. Yes, our Snackers are much appreciated. They give our parishioners not only nutrients but also a reason to stop after mass and speak with fellow parishioners. This is one of those rare ministries where you can involve the whole family.

So, at your next mass, look around and feel privileged. Not only are you privileged to receive the Eucharist, but the church offers you many possibilities for the honor of volunteering for the church. Go forth and enjoy your privileges. God Bless you all.